COSMETIC SURGERY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM
JACKSON LEARS

KERRY'S MISSING ECONOMIC MESSAGE
THE EDITORS

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

Coming Apart?

LOSING THE SHIA
Joshua Hammer

IRAQIFICATION FAILS
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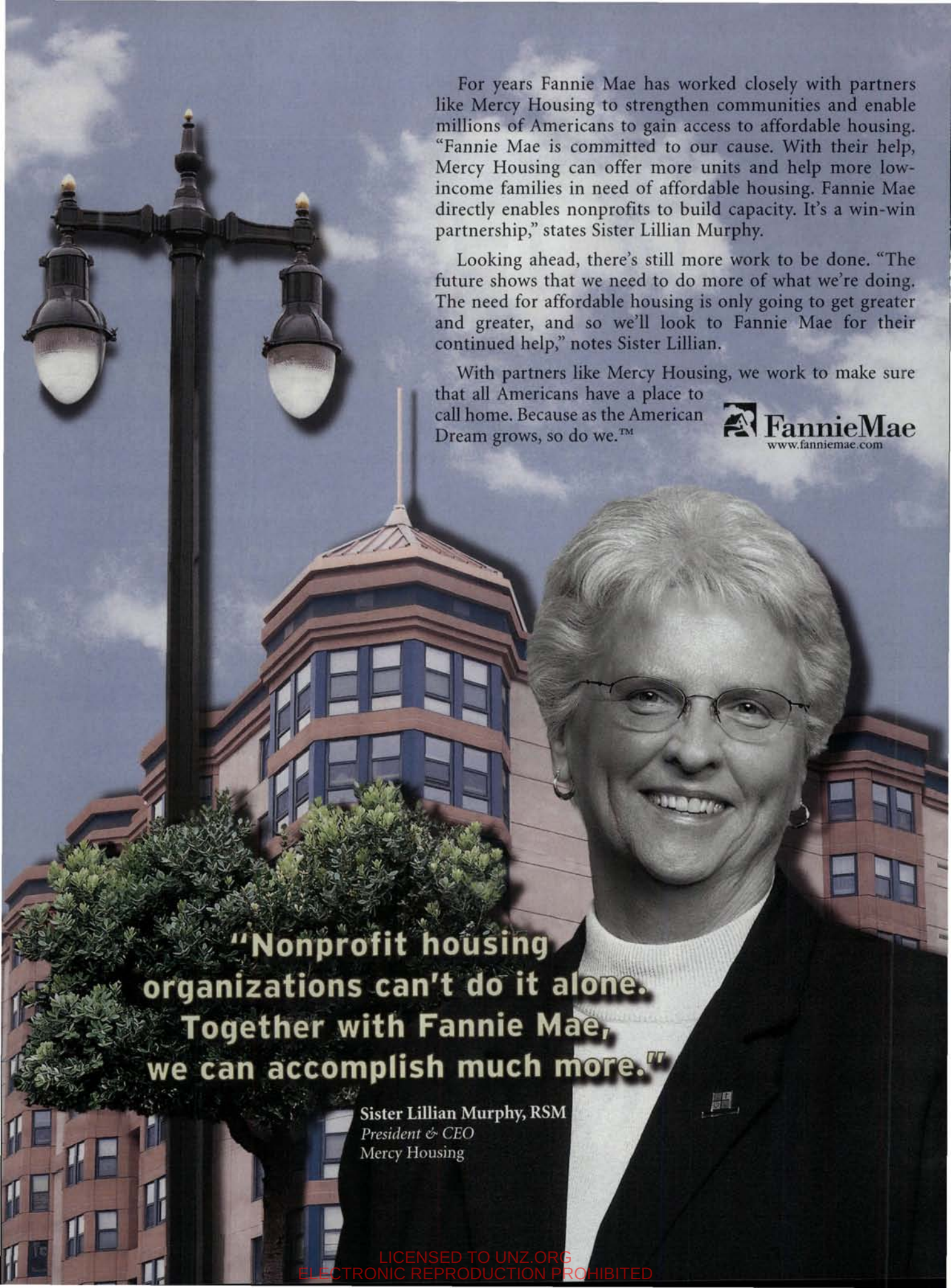
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CORRESPONDENCE

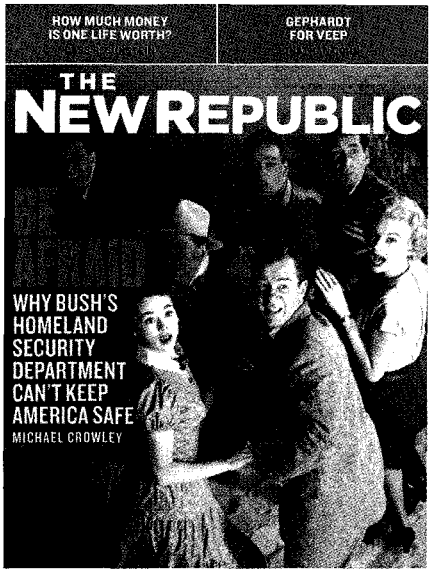
HOME SWEET HOME

I WAS DISAPPOINTED TO READ MICHAEL Crowley's partisan attack on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) ("Playing Defense," March 15). His assertion that "DHS has been a disaster: underfunded, undermanned, disorganized, and unforgivably slow-moving" is both inaccurate and irresponsible. Reporting of this nature, which places slanderous accusations ahead of sound research, does a disservice to the 180,000 employees at the Department, the people of this great nation, and the protection of our country.

Contrary to this ill-informed piece, the creation and operation of this new department has been marked by a unique combination of cooperation and accomplishment. It began with overwhelming bipartisan support in Congress, continued with cross-cultural teamwork as we merged 22 agencies, and, just one short year into existence, we stand today unified behind one idea—that of preserving our freedoms and protecting the United States. These are not goals to be divided among partisan adversaries. They are goals to unite behind as American citizens.

Anyone familiar with our accomplishments would understand the success that has grown from this common purpose. We improved air security from the curbside to the cockpit. We built new layers of security around our ports and coastlines. We stockpiled one billion doses of antibiotics and vaccines so we would never be left unprepared for a biological attack. And, after years of posturing but little progress, we quickly established the US-VISIT program, which uses biometric identifiers to speed the entry of innocent travelers to the United States and stop terrorists before they arrive.

Crowley's simplistic reporting, however, misses the even larger point: Homeland security is not about the federal bureaucracy, but rather the integration of a nation. His biased and pitifully superficial attacks are no doubt as hurtful to hundreds of thousands of homeland security professionals in our hometowns—firefighters, police, EMTs, and Guardsmen—as they are to the men and women of


HOW MUCH MONEY IS ONE LIFE WORTH?
GEPHARDT FOR VEEP
THE NEW REPUBLIC
WHY BUSH'S HOMELAND SECURITY DEPARTMENT CAN'T KEEP AMERICA SAFE
MICHAEL CROWLEY

DHS who work diligently to protect all of us.

Together with leaders in the private sector; our state, local, and tribal colleagues; and concerned citizens nationwide, we are pulling our oars in the same direction—toward securing our homeland. Crowley and THE NEW REPUBLIC should get on board—or at least refrain from baseless demagoguery.

JAMES M. LOY
Deputy Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C.

MICHAEL CROWLEY REPLIES: Admiral James M. Loy calls my story "inaccurate" and "slanderous," yet he doesn't challenge a single specific fact. By contrast, since the story appeared, I've heard from DHS workers who thanked me for revealing information the administration prefers to gloss over. It's especially sad to see Loy, whom several people cited to me as one of DHS's most able leaders, resort to the facile "get-on-board" rhetoric the Bush administration employs against any criticism of its troubled homeland security policies.

VICE SQUAD

JONATHAN COHN'S MARCH 15 article, "See Dick Run," highlights the view that Richard Gephardt would be a better vice-presidential choice for John Kerry than John Edwards. Maybe yes, maybe no. I think that Kerry should preapprove a few possible running mates and then invite the entire Democratic National Convention to make the choice. This would create some additional excitement at the convention and make delegates actually feel relevant. Also, the possible candidates could do some intensive preconvention campaigning for Kerry—enabling Democratic leaders to get a better impression of the pluses and minuses each candidate brings to the table.

PAUL FEINER
Greenburgh, New York

GROWING PAINS

ACCORDING TO TNR'S MARCH 8 editorial, "Unfair," "the argument for free trade is that it boosts overall economic growth." This argument no longer persuades, because ordinary Americans have not been sharing in overall economic growth to any important extent. From 1980 to January 2004, the hourly wage of ordinary Americans in the private sector went up only 4 percent in real terms, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data. In contrast, from 1980 to 2003, per capita GDP grew by 58 percent in real terms.

If ordinary Americans genuinely shared in economic growth, their real wages would have increased more than a measly 4 percent. The overwhelming majority of Americans have benefited trivially or not at all from economic growth. Why, then, should ordinary Americans support free trade? Glib talk about how free trade promotes economic growth will not do.

JOHN HARLLEE JR.
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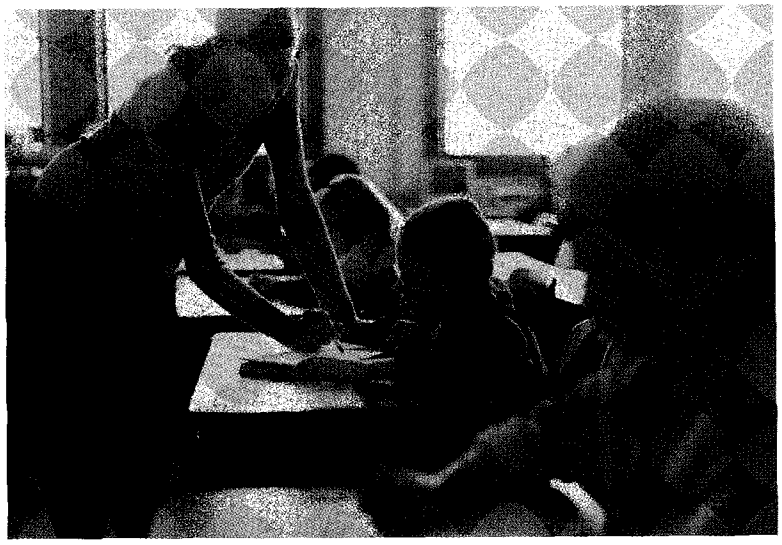
AN ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING



Noxious fumes overwhelm students and teachers in an Alabama school. Mold spores breed in classrooms throughout New Orleans. And large numbers of teachers in Chicago and Washington endure poor air quality in their schools. These are just a few of the many disturbing examples of the environmental health problems plaguing our nation's schools.

Every weekday, eight million children and millions of teachers across America go to schools whose poor air quality can make them sick. These and other unsafe environmental conditions can cause a wide range of health problems—including asthma, nausea, fatigue, dizziness, and severe headaches.

A recent study by the General Accounting Office found that the air is unfit to breathe in nearly fifteen thousand schools across America. And it's not just the poorest or oldest schools that are struggling with this problem; environmental health threats exist in urban, rural, and suburban schools, and in old and new schools alike.

How can we expect students to do their best under these shameful circumstances? According to the American Lung Association, American school children miss more than ten million school days each year because of asthma aggravated by poor air quality. But even when they are able to attend classes, these students can suffer academically—up to 17 points lower on achievement tests, regardless of family background, according to a UCLA study. And these conditions also have a serious impact on the work and effectiveness of teachers.

A number of solutions are simple and inexpensive. Increased training, which the AFT provides to many school systems, offers assistance to principals, teachers, and other school employees in recognizing and addressing unhealthy conditions in schools. Some environmental concerns can be remedied through stepped-up maintenance and repairs to faulty circulation systems, or by doing something as sensible as banning the use of toxic cleaning agents.

Other solutions will require a more comprehensive effort, from both state legislatures and the U.S. Congress. A good first step would be to have a federal agency gather information and accurately document children's health symptoms and illnesses associated with school environmental quality, something that is not currently done.

Whatever it takes, it is unacceptable to subject students and staff to the health risks so many of them currently face. We can't expect to hold our children and teachers to high academic standards when their learning environments are substandard.

To learn more about education programs and resources that work, visit our Web site at www.aft.org.

"American school children miss more than ten million school days each year because of asthma aggravated by poor air quality."

—AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION

A Union of Professionals

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American Federation of Teachers
Sandra Feldman, President

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Of Little Faith

TRB FROM WASHINGTON

It's not just American troops who are under siege this week in Falluja and Najaf, and it's not just the Bush administration. Also fighting for its life is a worldview that has defined U.S. foreign policy since 1989.

That worldview is democratic universalism—the belief that every people, no matter how alien their culture or despotic their history, desires liberal democracy. During the cold war, this quintessentially American faith was tempered by a global ideological foe that also claimed to represent the aspirations of mankind. But, when Soviet communism collapsed, so did American inhibitions about telling authoritarian governments what was best for their people. The Clinton administration made democracy-promotion the centerpiece of its policy toward the Third World. And, even after the Somalia fiasco suggested the limits of America's ability to implant liberal democracy in weak states, the Clintonites kept trying—in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor.

For a time in the 1990s, Republicans worried that America's democratic missionizing was stretching our military too thin and breeding resentment. In a debate with Al Gore in 2000, candidate George W. Bush said, "I just don't think it's the role of the United States to walk into a country and say, 'We do it this way, so should you.'" But, after the September 11 attacks, when Bush needed an ideological foundation for the war on terrorism (and later, a post-hoc justification for war against a WMD-less Saddam Hussein), he too turned to democratic universalism. The United States, Bush has argued again and again, will help the people of the Middle East fulfill their democratic desires—thus undermining Al Qaeda's appeal. And, while many Democrats have criticized Bush's reliance on unilateral, military means, few oppose Bush's goals themselves. The suggestion that Iraqis, or others in the Middle East, may not really want democracy has remained largely taboo in Washington, a violation of the democratic-universalist ethos that both parties share.

This week, that may have begun to change. For many Americans, the truly shocking thing about the recent uprisings in the Sunni triangle and the Shia south is less the violence itself than what it appears to indicate about Iraqi public opinion. The Sunni Baathists and Islamists in Falluja, and the Taliban-esque army of Shia cleric Moqtada Al Sadr, all advocate deeply undemocratic, even totalitarian, visions for Iraq. The United States, by contrast, has just midwifed an interim constitution that offers Iraqis unprecedented individual freedom. And yet newspaper reports, and even some American intelligence officials, suggest that the insurgents enjoy considerable popular support. Iraqi police and army units have refused to fight the rebels, and some have even joined them. Prominent Shia clerics—and even some members of America's handpicked Iraqi Governing Council—have denounced the U.S. crackdown.

The Bush administration, while acknowledging that the United States faces a military challenge in Iraq, has vigorously denied that it faces an ideological one. The rebels, Bush said in his weekly radio address, represent a "small faction." Joint Chiefs Chairman General Richard Myers has claimed that "Sadr has a very small following." Donald Rumsfeld calls the rebels "thugs, gangs, and terrorists."

But some on the right have begun flirting with a far more subversive interpretation of events: that perhaps Iraqis don't want democracy after all. While Bush in his prime-time press conference virtually called people who think Muslims cannot achieve democracy racists, *National Review Online* this week published a piece by freelancer Steven Vincent arguing that "there is something unstable and ungovernable at the heart of Shiism—something that is not specific to Sadr's intifada, but which in fact runs through the entire religious sect." And more prominent conservatives have also lapsed into cultural pessimism. On "Fox News Sunday," Brit Hume wondered "whether the Iraqi people have it within them to do what it takes to establish, participate in, and run a democracy." On his show the next day, Bill O'Reilly raised similar questions. "The future," he declared, "really all hinges on the Iraqis themselves. If they fight for their freedom, they'll get it. If they support the terrorists and the religious fanatics, they'll be enslaved again." In other words, it's at least possible that Iraqis *want* to be enslaved.

As my colleague Spencer Ackerman notes on his Web log this week (*www.tnr.com/iraqd*), John Kerry has also begun subtly reflecting this new pessimism, eschewing the word "democracy" in his April 13 *Washington Post* op-ed in favor of a merely "pluralistic" Iraq. But liberals can scale back their expectations of what is now possible in Iraq without abandoning democratic universalism—they can simply say the Bush administration has bungled the job. It is conservatives, who remain generally unwilling to criticize the administration's postwar stewardship, who will more likely be forced—if the situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate—to blame Iraqis instead. If the Iraq project fails, and John Kerry wins the presidency, it's quite possible to imagine a headlong return to the right-wing cultural relativism of the late '90s.

That would be a tragedy, not least because, fundamentally, I think President Bush is right that Iraqis want democracy. The problem, as Ackerman has pointed out, is that the semi-anarchic conditions in which many Iraqis have lived for the last year are making them more sympathetic to nationalist strongmen who they think can bring order. (This is hardly a uniquely Middle Eastern sentiment: Think of Russian support for Vladimir Putin.) Moreover, they don't trust America's democratic intentions, particularly given that, in the name of minority rights, the United States seems to be trying to frustrate the will of the Shia majority. These are serious problems, but they don't represent anything like a fundamental Iraqi aversion to democracy. They could have been ameliorated—and perhaps still can—by better security, better communication by the Coalition Provisional Authority, and a calendar for building Iraqi political institutions that reflects realities on the ground rather than President Bush's political needs. But that won't happen unless this administration's supporters, as well as its opponents, demand that it change course—fast. Now, more than ever, democratic universalism needs defending—not simply in Iraq, but in Washington, too.

PETER BEINART

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Impoverished

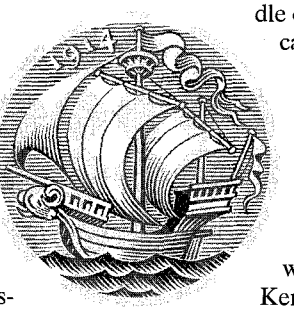
GIVEN THAT JOHN KERRY has thus far staked his presidential campaign largely on the economy's failure to produce jobs, it's no surprise that he was left spinning furiously after employers reportedly had added a healthy 308,000 positions last month. This hopeful development, he argued, was the result of some onetime occurrences—for example, the end of a grocery-workers' strike in California. Besides, he continued, many of the new jobs were part-time. "So you are not looking at the kind of robust, important job creation that the country really needs to raise the standard of living in our country," he concluded during a roundtable discussion with reporters.

It is, of course, easy to poke fun at the Democrats' occasionally verbose and meandering presumptive nominee. But Kerry's defensive tone on the March jobs report highlights a more fundamental flaw in his economic message: By focusing on short-term economic outcomes and quality-of-life indicators—many of which have little or no connection to anything the administration has done—he's failing to deliver a broad critique of Bush's economic policies and values, missing the forest for the trees.

To the extent the Kerry campaign has hinted at a broad economic critique, it's that the plight of the middle class has worsened substantially on George W. Bush's watch. During the primaries, Kerry focused on job creation. More recently, he needled the administration over rising gas prices. Then, this week, his campaign unveiled an attempt to unify these complaints: a so-called misery index—which combined jobs and gas prices with factors like the rise in college tuition, health care costs, and personal bankruptcies, along with the stagnation in personal incomes—to indict Bush for the country's worst economic stretch in three decades.

Gregg Easterbrook has noted one problem with this approach (see "TNR.commentary," page 9). Another is that, as the jobs report showed, focusing on short-term indicators makes you look pretty silly whenever one of them improves, even if only temporarily. Moreover, many of the negative outcomes Kerry decries aren't really Bush's fault. Job growth, for example, has been slow mostly because unprecedented productivity growth (generally a good thing) has made it unnecessary to hire new employees even as the economy expands.

But the biggest problem is that, by concentrating on a grab bag of disparate indicators assembled only because they're all negative, Kerry is missing an opportunity to focus attention, broadly but clearly, on the ongoing pattern of fiscal recklessness and economic injustice that has consistently characterized the administration's policies. Yes, there are times when running on voters' anxieties—whether or not they have anything to do with administration mismanagement—is the only option a presidential challenger has. In 1992, for example, George H.W. Bush's generally sound management of the economy left Bill Clinton with no other choice.



But 2004 is not 1992. And, unlike the first Bush administration, the current one has taken every opportunity to reward the wealthy interests that finance its election efforts at the expense of the public good: a reduction of the top marginal income tax rate, a planned repeal of the estate tax, a large reduction in the tax on dividend income and capital gains, a "Medicare reform" bill that doubles as a windfall for pharmaceutical companies, an energy policy heavily skewed toward fossil-fuel industries—the list goes on and on. Which is to say, whether or not college tuition rises this year, there are plenty of grounds on which to criticize the administration's economic stewardship.

John Edwards, Kerry's main rival in the Democratic primary race, developed a pithy and effective way of critiquing this agenda. The administration, Edwards argued, had embarked on a relentless effort to shift the country's tax burden from those who live off of their wealth to those who work for a living, and, more generally, to enforce one set of rules for the wealthy and another set for the poor and middle classes. Of course, each candidate has to articulate a critique that works for them, and it's unlikely that a Brahmin like Kerry would sound particularly believable aping Edwards, the son of a North Carolina millworker. But, unless Kerry can translate these same ideas into his own words—perhaps using the Kennedy-esque language of shared mission and shared responsibility he tends to favor—his chances of making inroads on domestic issues look worse and worse. As the recent jobs number demonstrates, economic circumstances may change between now and the election. President Bush's economic agenda won't. ■

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NOTEBOOK

THE WHITE HOUSE CHANGES ITS STORY . . . AGAIN

DEFENSELESS

OVER TIME, AMERICANS HAVE grown accustomed to the Bush administration defending an indefensible policy with some false, misleading, or incomplete talking point that is parroted verbatim by official after official. What was remarkable about the White House's insistence that President Bush could appear before the 9/11 Commission only with Vice President Dick Cheney at his side, however, is its apparent inability to come up with any defense whatsoever. At his Tuesday night press conference, Bush justified appearing with Cheney as follows: "Because it's a good chance for both of us to answer questions that the 9/11 Commission is looking forward to asking us. And I'm looking forward to answering them." That was it. In stark contrast to his other answers during the press conference—which, while evasive, tended to be long-winded—Bush choked out a couple of sentences and then went to the next question.

Indeed, the most expansive answer so far offered for the dual appearance was given by designated spinner Karen Hughes on NBC's "Meet the Press" the previous week. "I'm not sure what the rationale specifically was," she said, "but I think the White House believes that it is an effective use of their time." Effective use of their time? That's the opposite of the truth. Appearing together consumes an hour of time from each of Bush and Cheney; separate appearances would take up the same amount of time while allowing each to answer twice as many questions. The most revealing part of Hughes's answer, though, was her initial response that she didn't know what the rationale was. If the famously on-message Hughes doesn't know the party line, there is no party line. Sometimes the indefensible turns out to be, well, indefensible.

Karen Hughes

THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEVISED

NEW YORK REPRESENTATIVE Gregory Meeks has discovered the next great civil rights issue: the prime-time lineup on the UPN network. More specifically, Meeks, José Serrano, and other Latino and African American congressmen have loudly complained about Nielsen Media Research's proposed new system for gathering TV ratings. Under the old method, Nielsen recruited households to chart their viewing in a paper diary. Now, Nielsen wants to replace that system with a new breed of electronic "people meters" that automatically track viewing patterns. The congressmen say this is a problem because, in tests of the new meters, ratings for shows featuring African American casts (e.g. "Girlfriend," "Half & Half," "The Parkers") have plummeted. According to Nielsen, this simply reflects the inaccuracy of the old paper diaries. The new system is "airtight, it doesn't rely on memory," a Nielsen spokesman told the *New York Sun*. That hasn't deterred Meeks et al, who sent a letter to Nielsen complaining that reduced ratings would lead to the cancellation of minority shows, "harm minority empowerment," and "set back the cause of equal representation." Setting back the moral gravity of the civil rights movement by wasting it on TV ratings doesn't seem to bother Meeks at all.

CURIOUS GEORGE

ABOUT THE ONLY POSITIVE SPIN the Bush administration has been able to put on the August 6, 2001, President's Daily Brief (PDB), titled "bin Laden Determined To Strike in U.S.," is that the president himself requested that the CIA prepare it for his review. As national security adviser Condoleezza Rice told reporters in May 2002, when the existence of the August 6 PDB first came to light, it was the type of document that had "been prepared for [President Bush] because he's asked for a specific kind of document." And, for the last two years, the White House has stuck to this story, always noting that it was Bush's insatiable curiosity about terrorism that prompted the memo.

But, if you look closely, the Bush administration's explanation for the genesis of the document has changed subtly. Once, the administration claimed that the PDB was prepared because Bush had requested "a specific kind of document." But, recently, administration officials have said the PDB was prepared merely because of questions Bush had been asking about terrorism. "The August 6 PDB was in response to questions of the president," Rice asserted in her testimony before the 9/11 Commission last week. "In that sense, he asked that this be done." Or, as the president himself explained during his news conference this week, "I asked for the briefing. And the reason I did is because there

DAVID COWLES

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had been a lot of threat intelligence from overseas. ... And I asked at that point in time, let's make sure we are paying attention here at home, as well."

The reason for the shift? Because the CIA, in a letter to the 9/11 Commission, reported that it undertook the August 6 PDB "independently of any request." After Democratic Commissioner Richard Ben-Veniste revealed this discrepancy during the Commission's hearings on March 26, CIA Director George Tenet immediately fired off another letter to the Commission saying that, although there was no specific request from Bush for a PDB on Osama bin Laden's interest in attacking the United States, the president had asked enough questions about terrorism that the CIA concluded a PDB addressing the matter would be a good idea. That may well have been the case, but it's certainly not the same thing as Bush specifically requesting the document, as Rice originally claimed. And, given the White House's track record of stonewalling and obfuscating about anything related to the September 11 investigation, it's hardly out of the question to think that this latest story isn't true, either.

LOSS LEADER

READERS MAY NOT BE FAMILIAR with Christopher Orr's name. But for four years he has left his mark on virtually every issue of THE NEW REPUBLIC, improving literally hundreds of stories, and shaping TNR's style, its tone, and its vision of the world. This issue is his last, and, while he will be happily appearing weekly on TNR.com through his column, "Home Movies," his departure as executive editor represents a loss that will be felt subtly in TNR's pages, and palpably in its hallways, for years to come. We will miss his talent, his enthusiasm, and his fierce integrity, and do our best to continue to put out a magazine that continues in his spirit in the weeks and years to come. ■

TNR.commentary

Campaign Journal

RYAN LIZZA

NADER PARANOIA WATCH: An e-mail sent to supporters by Ralph Nader this week makes the following complaint:

> Both of these states [Texas and North Carolina] have unbelievably early deadlines to get on the ballot and unfair signature requirements. In Texas we need to collect 66,000 VALID signatures by May 10th.

Valid signatures? That *is* unfair! It's obviously just another stratagem by the two-party duopoly to crush dissenting voices.

EASTERBLOGG

GREGG EASTERBROOK

MISERY LOVES COMPANY: A standard economic indicator is the "misery index," the combination of the unemployment rate and the inflation rate. This index has the virtues of simplicity (unemployment and inflation are both indicators with widely agreed-upon meanings) and of clear importance (unemployment is a disaster for those it strikes, while inflation harms almost everyone).

Then there's the new "middle-class misery index" unveiled this week by John Kerry's presidential campaign. On the Kerry middle-class misery index, George W. Bush has "the worst record of any president ever"—though "ever" goes back only to 1976.

The Kerry index tracks seven indicators: median family income, personal bankruptcies, job growth in the private sector, home-ownership rates, and the costs of gasoline, health care, and college. Real-dollar median family income has been down under Bush, and that's indeed troubling. But, otherwise, the indicators in Kerry's middle-class misery index have been chosen because they are negative. (Home-ownership rates are positive; this category seems to have been added to allow for one favorable trend.) Suppose I announced an Easterblogg Happiness Index with these indicators: mortgage interest rates, crime rates, rates of heart disease, life expectancy at birth, rates of car ownership, median home size, air quality, water quality, highest educational degree earned, rates of accidental death, percentage of workforce employed in white-collar professions. Needless to say, I've chosen these because all trends in these categories are favorable. My happiness index would not be a fair assessment of society, because I've excluded the negatives. (Maybe I should throw in "accuracy of NBA jump shots" just to have one negative.) My all-positive index wouldn't tell you the larger trend, just as Kerry's all-negative index does not.

Even for what it measures, the Kerry middle-class misery index is open to question, as much of the index measures only costs, not benefits. Democrats, of all people, should not ignore benefits—if we only counted costs, there would never be pollution control. Health care costs are rising, but so are benefits. Rates of almost all major diseases are in decline while people are living ever-longer; this means society keeps getting more for its health care investment.

And college costs are rising, but so are benefits, with university enrollment rates setting records and an ever-higher percentage of high school graduates having at least some college experience. College costs seem to be up right now mainly for standard supply-and-demand reasons—demand (number of students wishing to enter) is rising faster than supply (freshman slots). You could certainly restrain college costs by reducing demand. But it's good that ever-higher numbers of students wish to enter college! This tells us many favorable things about trends in American middle-class life, as sending children to college, once a rarity, has become the national norm.

Kerry's index can make you giggle because, in order to be manipulated such that Bush has "the worst record of any president ever," indicators must be chosen that give a great economic rating to Jimmy Carter. When was "middle-class misery" lowest according to the index? At the end of the Clinton administration and in 1978. Can you find one single person in the United States who would want a time-machine ride to the economic conditions of 1978? That was the time of "stagflation," combined inflation and lack of growth. Unemployment was worse in 1978 than today, too.

But, then, the Kerry middle-class misery index has been doctored to remove inflation and unemployment as leading concerns, and there's a reason—both trends are in a positive cycle. You may not like W.'s economics—I don't like his tax policy for the top bracket—but you've got to have a pretty badly jiggered index to hide the favorable current status of the unemployment/inflation comparison, always one of the best measures of the economy. If inflation were as out of whack as it was under Carter, or unemployment as out of whack as it was in the first Reagan term, current misery would be far more pronounced. Give me the "misery" of the George W. Bush numbers any day.

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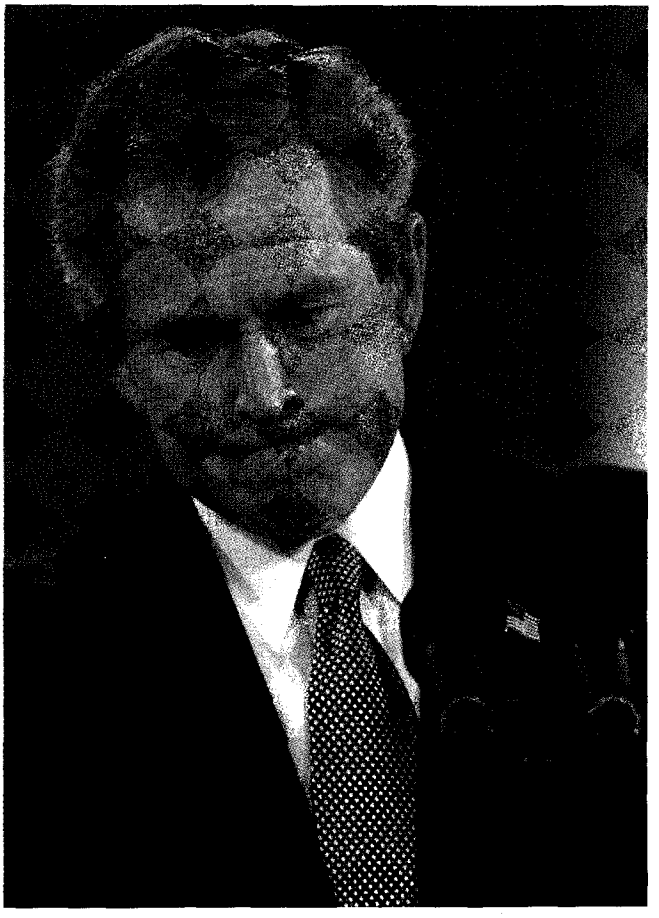
Campaign Journal
Stuck

BY RYAN LIZZA



Tuesday's press conference showed that, no matter what, President Bush will just stick to his old lines.

YOU COULD TELL it was going to be a bumpy night for George W. Bush even before Tuesday's press conference started. As dozens of reporters waited in the crammed and sweaty briefing room to be summoned up the front steps of the White House and into the cavernous East Room, the conversations turned to last year's charade. It was in March 2003 that Bush had last assembled the White House press corps for a prime-time Q & A session. The event probably marked a low point for White House reporters and a high point for Bush. It was the eve of the war with Iraq, and reporters sat on their cushioned Chiavari chairs, beneath the East Room's gold candelabras and chandeliers, and the ornate plaster filigree, and, as if intimidated by the majestic setting and the gravity of the moment, served up 50 minutes of pathetic, softball questions.

Tonight would be different. In our crowded holding pen, two reporters prepared for the grilling by reviewing a document, "Top 10 Unanswered Questions for President Bush's Press Conference," from David Sirota, the Democrats' most energetic opposition researcher. I overheard the word "payback" more than once. The press was ready to pounce. As reporters took their seats, conversations inevitably turned to sniping about Bush's heavy-handed habit of calling on reporters from a preselected list, which turns all but a dozen journalists into mere props for the evening. Among the reenergized press corps, even Helen Thomas, the ornery octogenarian columnist whom the White House had stripped of her historic front-row perch, garnered sympathy from a few of her fellow journalists. Once mocked, her prewar rants and hectoring about weapons of mass destruction now appeared almost prescient. But, noted one scribe, "She's been relegated to the cheap seats."

Given the feisty mood, it was no surprise that reporters spent much of the press conference trying to get Bush to say "uncle." Perhaps feeling duped themselves, the White House press corps spent 43 minutes vainly attempting to pry loose a concession from Bush that he has made mistakes. The question was asked half a dozen different ways. "How do you explain to Americans how you got [prewar claims about Iraq] so wrong?" asked ABC News. "Do you feel any sense of personal responsibility for September 11?" wondered *The New York Times*. "You never admit a mistake," a reporter charged. "Is that a fair criticism?" National Public Radio's correspondent pointed out that the president has been making the exact same remarks about Iraq for weeks. "I'd like to know," he asked, "if you feel, in any way, that you have failed as a communicator on this topic." Hunting for a glimmer of presidential introspection, *Time* queried, "After 9/11, what would your biggest mistake be, would you say, and what lessons have you learned from it?"

Bush, of course, did not yield. No mistakes made. No apologies offered. No failures admitted. In the defining moment of the evening, Bush's response to the question from *Time*, the president simply stood silent at the podium. Inside the room, it felt like time had stopped. He looked down at his notes. No help there—clearly he hadn't practiced for this question. He shifted his weight. He smirked. He shook his head. He puffed his cheeks. But nothing. Finally, he nervously blurted out, "I'm sure something will pop into my head here in the midst of this press conference, with all the pressure of trying to come up with answer, but it hadn't yet." It never did.

BEFORE THE PRESS conference, some in the media believed that Bush's performance could tip the president's popularity one way or the other. But, instead of changing Bush's political momentum, Tuesday's performance just reinforced the public's opinion about what his most dominant trait is. It's not leadership or stupidity, the two characteristics most often ascribed to the

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president by his allies and foes. It's that he refuses to change his mind.

The Annenberg Public Policy Center recently asked 1,800 people to rate Bush and John Kerry on a scale of one to ten for 17 different characteristics. On many issues, the scores revealed no advantage for either candidate. Voters rated them equally on whether they "care about people like me," "share my values," are "inspiring," "trustworthy," or have the "right kind of experience to be president." But the most extreme score was recorded when voters were asked how well the word "stubborn" applies to Bush. And the more important voters are to deciding the general election, the higher the score rose. Respondents from the 18 swing states thought Bush was even more stubborn than the rest of the country did. And, within the swing states, the so-called "persuadable" voters, a narrow band of Americans (about 11 percent of the electorate) undecided about the contest, found Bush even more stubborn. Interestingly, the impression that Bush is obstinate is far more ingrained than the impression that Kerry is a flip-flopper. Voters say the phrase "changes his mind for political reasons" applies about equally to both men. The coveted persuadables actually say it is a slightly better description of *Bush*. So, while the president may have spent $40 million on advertising to convince swing voters that Kerry changes his mind too much, they apparently are more concerned that Bush changes his too little.

Undoubtedly, there are some voters who use "stubbornness" as a term of admiration for Bush. Who wouldn't want a president to be stubborn about the hunt for terrorists, for example? But, overall, Bush's stubbornness seems to be slowly transforming from an asset into a liability. Whereas it was previously tethered to the pillars of Bush's electoral strength—his resolution and leadership—now it is tied to his weaknesses. Two of the other big disadvantages for Bush in Annenberg's comprehensive character survey were "recklessness" and "arrogance." Swing voters still see Bush as a "strong leader," but increasingly they describe him as a stubborn, reckless, and arrogant one.

That impression could not have been helped by Bush's repeated obfuscation during Tuesday night's appearance. He refused to answer a straight question about why he needs Vice President Dick Cheney by his side when he is interviewed by the 9/11 Commission. One could hear Democratic hair being pulled out when Bush casually explained, "It would have been nice if there were certain things in place [before September 11]; for example, a Homeland Security Department. I say that because it's—that provides the ability for our agencies to coordinate better and to work together better than it was before." Bush, of course, opposed the creation of the Department for nine months after September 11. The president even shrugged off documentary evidence that contradicted the administration line about pre–September 2001 intelligence. Just hours earlier, the 9/11 Commission had released a report that said, "A Terrorist Threat Advisory in late June [of 2001] indicated that there was a high probability of near-term 'spectacular' terrorist attacks resulting in numerous casualties." But, when Bush was asked about such warnings, he never acknowledged the new information and stuck to a narrow and clearly inaccurate summary of the now-infamous August 6, 2001, President's Daily Brief: "Bin Laden Determined To Strike in U.S." "The report, itself," he said, "I've characterized as mainly history, and I think, when you look at it, you'll see that it was talking about '97 and '98 and '99." And, finally, when one reporter said to Bush, "Polls show that support for your policy [in Iraq] is declining and that fewer than half Americans [sic] now support it. What does that say to you?" Bush falsely restated the question, responding, "And, as to whether or not I make decisions based upon polls, I don't. I just don't make decisions that way."

Of course, the White House does worry about polls, and a flurry of them released in April shows that Bush is in trouble. After all, refusing to change course or admit mistakes can become deadly once a strong majority thinks the current course is untenable, and that seems increasingly to be the case. The number of people saying the country is on the right track versus the wrong track—numbers that presidents live and die by—is approaching a 40/60 split, suggesting Bush is approaching a political tipping point. In the reelection campaigns of the four most recent incumbent presidents, there are two clear models. In 1984 and 1992, both Ronald Reagan's and Bill Clinton's Gallup approval ratings never dipped below 52 percent after January. By contrast, in 1980, Jimmy Carter's approval rating started the year in the mid- to high 50s. In the spring it sunk into the 40s and then 30s. After May, it never rose above 38 percent. In late 1991, George H. W. Bush was still in the 50s. But he started the new year at 46 percent and kept sinking through Election Day. These are only four examples, but, for months, the Bush campaign has argued that the lesson to be learned from these four cases is that a spring approval rating below 50 percent is a harbinger of defeat.

Bush is teetering between the two models, but the trend seems more Carter/Bush than Reagan/Clinton. His average approval rating in eight April polls released before his press conference was 48 percent. Democrats believe that number will drop further, noting that the approval rating is a lagging indicator and that the right-track/wrong-track numbers are a good guide to where approval goes next. Republicans argue that Bush is still tracking closer to Reagan's and Clinton's numbers than Carter's and Bush 41's. "George W. Bush is closer to the guys that got elected than the guys that lost," insists Republican pollster Whit Ayres. "He's a good eleven points above his father and thirteen points above Jimmy Carter at this point. And that's after a really bad couple of weeks." But the more important point is that he's behind Kerry.

It's common for a president faced with a sudden decline in popularity to think that, if he could only get his message out more effectively, his problems would be solved. Bush

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has always leaned heavily on the crutch of the big speech or bold press conference to turn things around. But he doesn't have a message problem; he has a reality problem. "The administration is like a person who talks more loudly and slowly to people who don't understand English," says a Senate Democratic aide. Unless the reality of the threats Bush faces from Iraq, the 9/11 Commission, and the economy abate, he'll continue to fare poorly. As Ayres puts it, "This election will be event-driven." Facts are stubborn things. ■

Chennai Dispatch

SOL

BY STÉPHANIE GIRY

MUNIYAMMAL KRISHNAN, a small, round 45-year-old from Kunvathur, a village near Chennai (formerly Madras) in southeastern India, has worked as a "human scavenger" since she was a little girl, cleaning the latrines of upper-caste villagers. Before there was running water in Kunvathur, she carried away human excrement in a bucket on her head. By birth, it's incumbent on Krishnan to handle feces for a living, because, like more than 150 million Indians, she is an untouchable and belongs at the bottom of the Hindu caste hierarchy.

Krishnan and six family members live on about 1,000 rupees ($22) per month in a two-room house—a brick-and-mortar cube with a corrugated roof—in a little dirt alley. Standing in the door frame, under a picture of the elephant-headed god Ganesh, guardian of entrances, Krishnan described daily reminders of her status as an untouchable. Upper-caste villagers won't frequent the temple in which she prays. Her bosses enforce what's known as the "two-tumbler" policy: They refuse to let her use their cups for tea, forcing her to bring her own and drink outdoors.

For untouchables like Krishnan, who haven't benefited from the government's generous but poorly enforced affirmative action programs, the best way to fight caste stigma has been to convert from Hinduism to more egalitarian religions. But the future of that strategy is now uncertain, because the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Hindu nationalist party that heads India's ruling coalition, is reviving a long-forgotten law that penalizes religious conversions.

The BJP has worked hard recently to soften its trademark Hindu-supremacist rhetoric. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is turning statesman, having jump-started peace talks with Pakistan. In state elections in December, the BJP badly beat its main opposition, the secular Congress Party, by focusing on economic issues rather than Hindu ideology. The party celebrated these victories by calling a general election for April, months ahead of schedule. Foreign media outlets suggested that this newfound moderation is a sign that the BJP is finally maturing. "Mr Vajpayee [has] tacked to a more moderate line, with campaigns stressing development and stable government," *The Economist* reported in January.

More likely, however, the BJP's chauvinism will resurface once it re-cements its grip on power. Indeed, the BJP's anti-conversion campaign is proof of the party's insidious tactics. While it offers a moderate face to key constituencies at home and abroad, it's quietly promoting bigoted policies that affect voters it knows it cannot win over, like untouchables and religious minorities.

LOWER-CASTE INDIANS are known as "untouchables" because they're considered too impure to touch: According to Hindu mythology, they are the bastard children of primordial low-caste and high-caste Hindus. Because of their tainted origin, untouchables were traditionally forced into the most squalid jobs and kept away from members of the upper castes. These rules survived for centuries, because they both honored Hinduism's founding myths and served the economic interests of the elite, which exploited untouchables as cheap labor. Today, untouchables still lag far behind other Indians. More than 20 million are bonded laborers. Only 7 percent have access to safe drinking water, electricity, and toilets. According to Smita Narula, a former researcher at Human Rights Watch, it's no coincidence that untouchables are disproportionately poor. "Poverty is manufactured to maintain the status quo," she says.

This oppressive tradition has been mitigated somewhat by protections granted to untouchables under the constitution India adopted in 1950. The constitution bans caste-based discrimination and requires that positions in parliament, higher education, and the civil service be set aside for untouchables in proportion to their share of the general population. These measures have propelled some untouchables to prominent political posts: K.R. Narayanan held the country's presidency, a ceremonial but visible position, from 1997 to 2002. They've also helped untouchables develop a social network, a distinctive subculture marked by rebellious literature and poetry, and a new political consciousness—untouchables now ask to be called *dalits*, the "oppressed" or "broken" people.

Still, the constitution's promise hasn't been met. Today, *dalits* account for about 15 percent of India's population and thus by law are entitled to 15 percent of the spots in the civil service and at universities. In reality, however, seats reserved for *dalits* in higher education remain vacant: They're open only to candidates who have the schooling to compete for them, and not many *dalits* do. The institutions in the best position to enforce the quotas—the police and the judiciary—rarely bother to, because they aren't subject to any them-

Stéphanie Giry is an associate editor at FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

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selves and don't have many *dalits* on their staff. Nor do untouchables fare well in the unregulated private sector. "In modern businesses, they [*dalits*] are conspicuous by their absence," reported *The Washington Post* in 2002.

Given the laws' limitations, *dalits* have tried to emancipate themselves by converting from Hinduism to religions that promise to treat them as equals. Traditionally a tool of Christian missionaries, conversion became a political strategy in 1956, when, during a mass ceremony, B.R. Ambedkar, a *dalit* leader, convinced half a million untouchables to convert to Buddhism to protest exploitation. Since then, another three million *dalits* have become Buddhists. And, according to John C.B. Webster, a leading authority on conversions in India, hundreds of thousands of *dalits* have quietly turned to Christianity. In the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, isolated villages have recently switched to Islam, whose influence is growing as young Indians return to the region after working in the Persian Gulf.

To be sure, conversion is no panacea. Its benefits can be largely symbolic, since upper-caste Hindus still view converted *dalits* as second-class citizens. Still, says Webster, conversion allows untouchables to redefine themselves primarily in terms of religion rather than caste, removing some indignities. And joining India's well-funded and well-organized Christian community, which runs some of India's best schools, can also bring significant social and economic benefits.

Yet, ironically, the laws that were created to uplift *dalits* make it difficult for them to convert. India's constitution mandates affirmative action programs for "scheduled castes" (its word for untouchables), but, in 1950, an executive order declared that non-Hindus didn't fall under that category and so weren't eligible. That put *dalits* in a cruel predicament: either stay Hindu and claim affirmative action or convert and forgo it. Since the '50s, religious minorities have lobbied the government to secure exceptions to this order for their *dalit* populations. Sikh *dalits* won all benefits in the mid-'50s; Buddhist untouchables got most of them in the '90s. But the government still hasn't extended any exceptions to Muslims. As a result, there are now three classes of *dalits* among religious minorities: those who get all the affirmative action set-asides (Sikhs), those who get some (Buddhists), and those who get none (Christians and Muslims).

This triple standard has created perverse incentives, said C.K. Tamilarasan, a *dalit* member of the Tamil Nadu state assembly and the general secretary of the Republican Party of India, the party Ambedkar founded in the 1930s. In the state-funded Chennai apartment he uses as an office, Tamilarasan explained that for some *dalits* it's worth losing benefits to convert to Christianity, because they gain dignity and access to the Christian community's vast network of social services. "Whatever the government can do for *dalits*, Christian missionaries can do better," he said.

But the situation is more complex. When I asked him if he is still a Hindu, Tamilarasan shifted uneasily in his seat and pulled from under his white shirt a medallion featuring Ambedkar on one side and Buddha on the other. Dangling it, he said he "practiced" Buddhism but hadn't officially converted; otherwise, he would have been denied the reserved state assembly seat he now holds. Like Tamilarasan, some *dalits* convert without updating their civil status so they can continue to claim all government set-asides. But the vast majority of poor untouchables aren't savvy enough to play the system. They stand to suffer a loss with every gain, because their two best chances at advancement, affirmative action and religious conversion, often cancel each other out.

THE BJP IS now offering to relieve untouchables of this painful dilemma—not by solving it, but by removing their opportunity to convert. Banning conversions is consistent with the party's aggressive Hindutva ideology, which hopes to purge India of non-Hindu influences. The party treats Buddhism and Sikhism as indigenous offshoots of Hinduism, while demonizing Christianity and Islam as alien religions brought to India by colonialists and plunderers.

The BJP is the political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu supremacist group, and the RSS's religious mouthpiece, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Leaders of both the RSS and the VHP have vociferously charged that foreign missionaries are turning *dalits* into Christians or Muslims in a bid to take over India. The VHP's general secretary, Mohan Joshi, estimated recently that some 1.8 million Indians convert to minority religions every year; at that rate, he forecast, "the country will be divided into two nations" within 25 years. This, however, is sketchy arithmetic. In fact, four in five Indians are Hindus. And the Christians' modest share of the country's total population—2.3 percent—is actually dwindling, because of Christians' lower fertility rates.

Still, bad math can make for good rhetoric, especially among BJP hard-liners like Narendra Modi, chief minister of Gujarat state, who is suspected of having helped incite riots that killed 2,000 Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. A few months after the riots, Modi was reelected on an anti-Muslim ticket and then started nursing back to life the defunct anti-conversion law. When he saw it through the Gujarat legislature in March 2003, the law existed in only four states. In three of them, the law was a forgotten legacy of the Congress Party, which had passed it in the 1960s and 1970s to court voters and then, having won their support, never bothered to enforce it.

The Freedom of Religion Bill, as the Gujarat law is known, punishes anyone who converts another person through force, fraud, or "allurement" with up to three years in prison and a fine of about $2,200. Taken literally, it doesn't seem to violate the constitution's ban on caste discrimination or its promise to protect freedom of religion. But its fine print targets *dalits* who want to convert to Christianity and Islam. Aravinda Pajanor, a constitutional law expert based

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in Chennai, says the law singles out untouchables by imposing stiffer penalties for converting them than for converting other groups. And, by prohibiting only conversions performed by "religious priests," it singles out conversions to Christianity and Islam, because those religions' ceremonies are officiated, whereas Hindu and Buddhist rites are not.

Worse, the law gives too much enforcement power to local magistrates, usually upper-caste Hindus prone to blocking defections to minority religions. The law asks magistrates to vet all conversions, and it allows them to prosecute those induced through "allurement" without defining what that is. Such gaps leave prospective converts with no clear idea of what's allowed and no grounds on which to defend themselves if they're accused of breaking the law. Moreover, Hindu supremacists argue that the law bans only conversions to minority religions because conversions to Hinduism aren't "conversions" at all. A native Muslim who wants to become a Hindu can't, they claim, because one is either born into the caste system or not. Meanwhile, a former Hindu *dalit* who has become a Muslim and wants to be a Hindu again isn't converting: He's merely "coming home."

The law is poised to spread quickly beyond the five states where it exists today. The BJP is committed to passing it in every state it controls, and, because of India's complex party politics, it could also gain ground in other states. As long as opposition parties believe the law can help them forge alliances with the BJP, they too have a reason to endorse it. A national anti-conversion bill could also be passed if the BJP gains clear control of parliament in the upcoming elections. (The BJP-led coalition that runs India holds about 55 percent of the 545 seats in the lower house, but the BJP alone accounts for only about one-third.) In the meantime, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, a federal agency staffed principally with BJP sympathizers, is drafting a directive modeled after the Gujarat law that could become binding across the country, without congressional approval, as soon as it is published in the official gazette.

Minority groups and nongovernmental organizations have sounded the alarm, organizing protests and threatening mass conversions to Christianity and Islam. But the issue hasn't been getting the attention it deserves, largely because of the law's innocuous-seeming text, the BJP's patient maneuvering, and entrenched caste prejudice. That the BJP has kept its anti-conversion campaign quiet in the run-up to the April elections should make it more, not less, threatening. By the time it's in full view again, it could be too late. ■

Al Qaeda's new soldiers.

Fair Game

BY ROBERT S. LEIKEN

AMONG THE MANY unpleasant truths Americans have had to face since September 11, 2001, is that some of their fellow citizens are among the terrorists trying to harm the United States. Shortly after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, two men from Portland, Oregon, traveled to China, bound for Afghanistan, where they hoped to fight for the Taliban and Al Qaeda. According to the FBI, Earnest James Ujaama, a Seattle resident, tried to set up an Al Qaeda training camp in the northwestern United States in 1999. And, of course, Chicago native Jose Padilla was arrested in May 2002 after American intelligence alleged he had collaborated with Al Qaeda to try to build a "dirty bomb."

Aside from their nationality, another thread linked these men: All were converts to Islam. Each year, thousands of people become Muslims, and, while the vast majority join for reasons having little to do with politics, Al Qaeda has begun to single out the small minority who are susceptible to the violent philosophy perpetrated by the religion's radical fringe. Of the 212 individuals implicated in major terrorist attacks around the world since the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, 18 were converts. Osama bin Laden reportedly sees Western converts as an especially potent weapon—not least because recruits from outside the Middle East and Central Asia are less likely to attract attention.

Despite the high-profile instances of American converts to radical Islam who then joined Al Qaeda, it is European converts who pose the greater threat. Because of the number of individuals turning to Islam in Europe, and because of the stronger Al Qaeda infrastructure there, Western Europe, it seems, has become fertile ground for a new type of Al Qaeda terrorist—one specifically recruited to evade post–September 11 security.

RELIGIOUS CONVERSIONS HAVE many causes. Those adopting a new religion may find the tenets of another faith more appealing, or perhaps they want to share the faith of a fiancé or spouse. But, in Europe, a newly fashionable, and less sanctified, trend has increased the number of conversions to Islam. According to French scholar of Islamism Olivier Roy, bin Laden and his chief strategist, Egyptian jihadi Dr. Ayman Al Zawahiri, are seeking to tap "protest converts," young Europeans who convert to Islam "to stick it to their parents, to their principal. They convert in the same way

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people in the 1970s went to Bolivia or Vietnam [as part of] a very European tradition of identifying with a Third World cause," Roy told the *Los Angeles Times*.

Of course, it is a great leap from conversion to terrorism. But, while it's not clear what prompts a Muslim convert to turn to Al Qaeda, it's possible that a small minority of European converts are attracted to the self-advertised anti-imperialism of Islam's more radical strains. Such individuals may then seek to ingratiate themselves into their adopted community. A French intelligence official told the *Times* last September that such converts "want to show other Muslims their worth. They want to go further than anyone else. They are full of rage and they want to prove themselves."

Whatever the reason, several European converts to Islam have played a role in Al Qaeda activities. Three of the nine Britons detained in Guantanamo Bay after being captured fighting for the Taliban in Afghanistan are Catholics who converted to Islam. A French convert, David Courtailler, allegedly has ties to a suspect arrested for the March 11 Madrid bombings and is allegedly linked to the Belgian group that procured false passports for the two Tunisians who assassinated Ahmed Shah Massoud, the leader of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, on September 9, 2001. (The attack appears to have been an attempt to decapitate anti-Taliban forces in anticipation of the U.S. response to September 11.)

To elude post–September 11 roundups of terrorists in Europe, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, bin Laden's now-jailed chief of operations, employed European converts, such as Christian Ganczarski, a Polish-born German. Ganczarski was Mohammed's liaison with Nizar Nawar, who in 2002 suicide-bombed a synagogue in Djerba, Tunisia, killing 21 people, including several European tourists. Despite monitoring by U.S. spy satellites, Mohammed had avoided detection by using converts like Ganczarski as intermediaries. (Padilla is another convert allegedly deployed by Mohammed.)

The French government has grown especially concerned about this phenomenon. In May 2003, following the invasion of Iraq, the renowned French anti-terrorist investigating judge, Jean-Louis Bruguiere, warned that Al Qaeda had stepped up its European recruiting efforts and was on the lookout for women and light-skinned converts in particular. A French intelligence official who spoke with the *Times* said, "Neither the Republic nor the families of the recruits have found a way to stop [the extremist recruiters]. We have more and more converts, young French with family problems, adolescent crises. Young girls too. For the Islamists, each convert is a great victory." According to the deputy director of the French Territorial Surveillance Directorate, "Converts are our most critical work now."

The British, too, are taking the threat seriously. When senior police officers speak about the existence of dozens of potential suicide bombers in the United Kingdom, they usually mean young, British-born Muslims of South Asian extraction who autonomously "freelance," hoping to fulfill bin Laden's call to attack British targets, according to the *London Observer*. But now police are also focusing on converts, especially from the Afro-Caribbean community, and British authorities have called on Muslim leaders for assistance. The Muslim Council of Britain recently contacted 1,000 mosques, urging their congregations to maintain "utmost vigilance" against hard-liners seeking to infiltrate mosques and convert vulnerable young men into fanatics. The appeal asked the United Kingdom's 1.6 million Muslims "to liaise with the local police and give them the fullest cooperation in dealing with any criminal activity including terrorist threats."

Such cooperation is certainly needed. British mosques have been, and still are, a locus of radical activity. After the attacks in Madrid, at a meeting outside London's Finsbury Park mosque—notorious for featuring the extremist preaching of Abu Hamza, the one-eyed cleric, and for hosting such people as "shoe-bomber" Richard Reid, accused terrorist Zacarias Moussaoui, and Ahmed Ressam, the "millennium bomber"—a militant with blonde brows buttonholed me, vowing another attack on the United States.

THE USE OF converts is a sign of Al Qaeda's changing tactics—a shift from using first-generation immigrants (usually aliens from the Middle East, like those in the Hamburg cell who participated in the September 11 attacks) to using natives of the country to be attacked (as was done in the 2003 attacks on Riyadh, Casablanca, and Istanbul).

Of some 10,000 recent converts to Islam in Britain, for instance, very few are thought to be extremist. But "finding that small handful is our absolute nightmare," according to a British police source quoted in *The Times* of London. As was demonstrated by Reid, himself a convert, America's Visa Waiver Program, which does not require most Western European travelers to submit to an interview, makes it child's play for a British citizen to board a plane bound for the United States. How are American immigration officials supposed to identify the terrorists among European nationals with European passports and faces?

The newly installed, computerized entry-exit system at U.S. airports—which photographs and fingerprints entrants and checks them against terrorist watch lists—will help. But, as September 11 demonstrated, many terrorists do not show up on watch lists. Face-to-face interviews are essential. Witness the arrest of the sweating Ressam by an alert customs official in Washington state and the interdiction of Mohammed Al Qahtani, the would-be "twentieth hijacker," who was turned away from the Orlando airport in August 2001 by a veteran immigration officer. We could increase the odds of identifying such terrorists if we placed Homeland Security Department agents at airline check-in counters and sky marshals aboard U.S.-bound flights from Europe. Only by adopting new tactics ourselves can we stay ahead of Al Qaeda's. ■

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Of course Iraqification failed. Train Wreck

BY SPENCER ACKERMAN

LAST WEEK, ARMED militiamen loyal to radical Shia cleric Moqtada Al Sadr seized control of several southern Iraqi cities, largely without resistance from the Iraqi security forces entrusted with keeping those areas under control. In Basra, about 30 black-shirted Sadrists marched up to the vacated governor's office—the governor having already fled in anticipation of Sadr's advance—and the Iraqi police officers guarding it simply stood aside. Others actively cooperated with the city's new rulers, stripping off their official armbands and convincing their comrades to join the winning team. "We are brothers with Sadr's men. We follow the same cause," one policeman told London's *The Daily Telegraph*. And Basra was no isolated incident. In Baghdad, Kufa, and the holy Shia city of Najaf, Iraqi forces proved either unwilling or unable to resist anti-occupation fighters; in Falluja, an entire Iraqi army battalion refused to fight Sunni insurgents.

Back in Washington, the Bush administration was caught off guard. According to a White House official interviewed by *Newsweek* this week, the Bushies had been convinced that the Iraqi security forces would be up to the job of going after U.S. enemies like Sadr. That's because, for the past year, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has sung the praises of "Iraqification"—the strategy of depending on rapidly convened Iraqi forces to safeguard the country rather than American troops—as a solution to an increasingly dire security situation. And, over the past year, experts repeatedly warned that Rumsfeld was deluded: that the United States hasn't fielded nearly enough troops to stabilize Iraq and that throwing Iraqis into uniform with minimal training wouldn't fill the vacuum. So, as the White House struggles to figure out what's gone wrong, the more appropriate question might be why they ever thought it would go right.

Moqtada Al Sadr may be dangerous and unrepresentative, but cracking down on him could stoke the fires that led to last week's battles, marginalizing more moderate Shia.

REUTERS/ATEF HASSAN/LANDOV

ALMOST SINCE THE day Saddam Hussein's regime was overthrown in April 2003, the Pentagon's impulse has been to reduce the American troop presence in Iraq. Last May, Defense Department planners announced their intention to decrease the U.S. force from roughly 150,000 soldiers to a mere 30,000 by the fall. Given that coalition forces were unable either to quash the resistance gathering in the Sunni Triangle or to arrest the spread of violent crime around the country, that anticipated drawdown never occurred. But deteriorating security conditions didn't stop the Pentagon from diminishing U.S. troop strength more subtly: By last month, there were only 110,000 American troops in Iraq.

The steady decline has largely been a function of Rumsfeld's conception of the role American forces should play in "post-conflict" operations. In August 2003, Senator John McCain visited Iraq, where he heard various officers describe how their forces were stretched too thin to address an increasingly sophisticated insurgency. As he recounted this week on NBC's "Meet The Press," McCain communicated this to Rumsfeld "as passionately as I could"; the defense secretary was unresponsive.

Rumsfeld's blasé attitude has deep ideological roots. A fervent critic of nation-building enterprises like those in the Balkans and East Timor, the defense secretary argued in September 2003 op-eds in *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal* that building a new Iraq risked creating "dependency," and, as a result, increasing U.S. troop levels "would be a mistake." Citing support from theater commanders (who serve in no small part at his pleasure) and the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council, he wrote, "Those advocating sending more American forces—against the expressed wishes of both our military commanders and Iraq's interim leaders—need to consider whether doing so would truly advance our objective of transferring governing responsibility to the Iraqi people." According to Rumsfeld, "Iraqis are eager to participate in their own security. ... We should resist the urge to do *for* the Iraqis what would better be done *by* the Iraqis."

But most experts didn't think the Iraqis

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could do better. In the summer of 2003, a study conducted by James Dobbins—a veteran of nation-building efforts in the Clinton administration and President Bush's envoy to Afghanistan after the Taliban fell—concluded that providing the same level of security in Iraq as enjoyed by postwar Kosovo would require 526,000 troops through 2005. Around the same time, a team of defense wonks led by former Deputy Defense Secretary John Hamre took a fact-finding trip to Iraq at the behest of Rumsfeld and Coalition Provisional Authority chief L. Paul Bremer. Hamre's group reported, "The current configuration of composite security forces (American, coalition, and Iraqi) does not adequately support the reconstruction mission." They did not argue against enlisting Iraqis to aid in their own security in the long run—that's an inevitability if the United States ever wants to leave the country. But they pointedly warned that "it is unrealistic to expect them to have the competence to do so in the near term. ... The new Iraqi security forces ... will not be capable of handling security matters without significant international oversight and rapid response capacity for at least two to five years."

The Pentagon refused to wait that long and essentially ignored Hamre's report. (According to Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith, "Not everyone in the Pentagon or in the U.S. government agrees with every factual analysis or judgment or recommendation in the report.") There were barely 38,000 Iraqis in uniform in August 2003. By November, that figure had ballooned to nearly 148,000; it currently stands at over 213,000. Such speed came at a cost. According to a Brookings Institution study released last week, only 22 percent of the 75,000-strong Iraqi police are either partially or fully trained. And, last month, Major General Charles Swannack, commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, complained of significant delays in equipping Iraqi forces with vehicles, radios, and body armor. What's more, as defense analyst Anthony Cordesman wrote in *The Washington Post* earlier this month, "no one in the coalition seems prepared to explain how we will solve myriad related problems with defections, infiltrators and turncoats." Last month, Bremer reluctantly acknowledged that "many of these people who are already in the police force are corrupt, they don't understand human rights, and some of them are engaging in attacks on the coalition."

The picture painted by Hamre's team and other experts looked much the same to the American soldiers responsible for training their new Iraqi partners. According to one soldier who recently returned from a year in the Sunni Triangle and who was involved in training Iraqis, recruits were given only two or three weeks of instruction. (U.S. Army soldiers, by contrast, receive nine weeks of basic training plus weeks or months of specialized training before deployment.) "We did the best we could, ... [but] you're not gonna have a well-trained force if you give them just two, three weeks of training," says this soldier, who did not want to be identified by name. The most important thing lost in the Iraqis' abbreviated boot camp was an all-important sense of mission. "You're trying to develop unit cohesion, develop an esprit de corps," he notes. "When the going gets tough, that's what's going to hold you together. If you don't have that, at the first sign of trouble, you're gonna have problems. ... I think that's one of the biggest reasons that these guys are not fighting or are turning around and joining Sadr's forces."

Unfortunately, these weren't messages that Pentagon officials wanted to hear. In February, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz vigorously defended a just-announced decision to reduce the number of operating locations for the 1st Armored Division in Baghdad from 26—already down from almost 60 earlier in the occupation—to six on the city's outskirts and two in the heavily fortified U.S. Green Zone. Even though this would make 8,000 Iraqis responsible for policing a city of over five million, Wolfowitz assured reporters, "Clearly, it's better for us if they're in the front line, and it's better for them and better for their country."

But the continual drawdown of American forces hasn't been better for anyone. Since the 1st Armored Division started to reduce its presence in Baghdad early in the occupation, shadowy insurgents have assassinated as many as 1,000 middle-class Iraqis—the backbone of civil society, which in turn is the backbone of a functioning democracy—including the deputy mayor and the head of the lawyers' association. The police force wasn't able to solve, let alone prevent, the murders. And, last week, when chaos gripped the streets of Baghdad, the overwhelmed police fled their posts rather than fight a bloody and futile battle.

Just as Hamre's group warned nine months ago, expecting Iraqis to fill the security gaps left by insufficient numbers of American troops was a delusion—a delusion that threatens the chances for Iraqi democracy. According to an ABC News poll released last month, 85 percent of Iraqis consider improving the security situation a top priority; surely not coincidentally, a breakaway plurality of 47 percent said that, over the next year, Iraq needed a "single strong Iraqi leader" to govern it. By contrast, only 28 percent said Iraq needed democracy.

Bremer has vowed that he's "not going to bring in any more untrained police," and General John Abizaid, the head of U.S. Central Command, has announced that, for the first time, he is going to ask that more American troops be sent to Iraq. But even his requested increase would bring the number of soldiers there to only about 125,000—which is still 25,000 fewer than at the start of the occupation, a number that wasn't nearly enough to begin with. Worse, even though instability is very likely to increase after the planned transfer of sovereignty to as-yet-unnamed Iraqis on June 30, Rumsfeld has shown no willingness to concede that his policy has failed. Asked last week about how the Iraqi security forces were handling the chaos, he snapped, "The suggestion that they're not out providing security for the country of Iraq would be a misunderstanding of the situation." Rumsfeld clearly knows a thing or two about misunderstanding the situation. ■

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Al Amarah Dispatch

Bad Neighbor

BY MICHAEL RUBIN

"THE AMERICANS MAY think they will have peace in eight months. But, even if they stay eighteen years, we will never give them peace." Sheik Muhammad Al Abadi, a member of the Badr Corps, the more radical military wing of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), an Islamist political group, didn't mince words as we sat in January at his home in the southern Iraqi city of Al Amarah. At the time, I was seconded to the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq from the Pentagon, where I had been an Iran and Iraq policy adviser. Al Abadi's walls were decorated with a picture of his late older brother and a large portrait of Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. An older man whispered to Al Abadi that I was American, and the bespectacled thirtysomething changed the subject. Several months later, the sheik's prophecy would come true, and widespread violence would erupt throughout southern Iraq.

Since the violence began, American officials and the media have blamed the bloodshed on poor postwar planning, miscalculations of the strength of radical cleric Moqtada Al Sadr, and even Shia anger at Iraq's new provisional constitution (see Joshua Hammer, "Preoccupied," page 20). But there's another factor largely unappreciated by the U.S. media and unchallenged by the CPA: the well-organized, highly effective infiltration of Shia into Iraq by the government of Iran.

THE IRANIAN SECURITY apparatus, having sparred with American forces in Bosnia and Afghanistan, was well-prepared to challenge the United States in Iraq. Almost a month before the opening salvos of the war, the Islamic republic began broadcasting Arabic-language television across the border. As U.S.-led coalition forces fought Saddam Hussein's fedayeen in Basra and advanced on Najaf in March 2003, units of the Badr Corps poured into northern Iraq from Iran, where SCIRI was based, provoking a strong warning to Tehran by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. According to an April 25, 2003, report by well-connected Iranian journalist Ali Reza Nurizadeh in the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, elite Iranian Revolutionary Guards "brought in radio transmission equipment, posters, pamphlets printed in [the Iranian holy city of] Qom, and huge amounts of money, some of which was used to buy weapons for the Badr Corps."

I arrived in Baghdad in July 2003. With temperatures soaring to 120 degrees Fahrenheit, most CPA staff remained inside air-conditioned headquarters, located in a former Saddam palace. Junior American diplomats tended to stay at their desks, while ambassadors traveled in armored cars among well-armed personal security details. What was good for security, however, was bad for political intelligence. After 35 years of dictatorship, Iraqis avoided talking to armed men, and the CPA staffers, penned up in their palace complex and out of touch with average Iraqis, missed evidence of increasing Iranian influence.

My first night in Baghdad, several Iraqis intercepted me in the Rashid Hotel lobby. Three years before, I had taught for a year in Iraqi Kurdistan; friends had planned a reunion. We talked, ate, and drank until shortly before the 10 p.m. curfew; throughout the evening, Arabs and Kurds alike warned that Iranian intelligence was taking advantage of the U.S. failure to secure Iraq's borders. Later that month, several Iraqis warned me that over 10,000 Iranians had entered Iraq. Coalition officials I spoke to seemed unconcerned, suggesting that the influx was simply Iraqi refugees returning home. But these American diplomats seemed unable to differentiate between returnees speaking Iraqi Arabic and people proficient in Persian, who spoke little or no Arabic; many of the Iranians coming into the country fell into the latter category.

Over subsequent months, I frequently visited the Iranian frontier. Traveling back roads along a smugglers' route in Iraqi Kurdistan, I encountered no U.S. patrols within 100 miles of the border, though American officials had vowed to police the frontiers. And, when I returned to Baghdad, I saw the results of open borders. I often visited Sadr City, a sprawling Shia slum named for Moqtada Al Sadr's slain father. Among posters of Moqtada Al Sadr, Khomeini, and other religious figures, hawkers sold everything from U.S. Agency for International Development rations to stolen cars to forged documents, such as passports and manifests. Safe-passage documents for traveling from Iran to Iraq cost only $50.

Sadr himself has become a recipient of Iranian cash. Iran's *charge d'affaires* in Baghdad, Hassan Kazemi Qomi, maintains close relations with Sadr. According to the April 6 edition of the Arabic newspaper *al-Hayat*, Qomi is not actually a diplomat but rather a member of the Revolutionary Guards, the elite Iranian terrorist network dedicated to the export of jihad; Qomi previously served as a liaison to Hezbollah. Meanwhile, Italian intelligence reports show that many Revolutionary Guards have moved to southern Iraq in recent months to organize and train Sadr's armed wing. This Iranian operation reportedly hides its true intentions under the guise of religious charities in Karbala, Najaf, and Kufa, while financial support is channeled to Sadr through Ayatollah Kazem Al Haeri, a Qom-based cleric and close confidant of Iran's supreme leader, Ali

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Khamenei. (The Office of the Supreme Leader retains a budget for which Khamenei is not accountable to Iran's president or parliament.) Italian intelligence has identified one of Haeri's students as Khamenei's personal representative to Sadr.

Sadr is not the only Islamist Shia leader receiving aid from Tehran. When I visited Nasiriya, a dusty town in southern Iraq, local clerics complained bitterly about Iranian intelligence officials swarming into town, creating a network of informers and funneling money to anti-U.S. forces. At a town-hall meeting in Nasiriya last October, tribal leaders repeatedly condemned the United States for failing to confront the "hidden hand"—Iranians coming into the city.

By January, the anti-U.S. Badr Corps, trained and financed by Iran's Revolutionary Guards, had established a large office on Nasiriya's riverfront promenade. Below murals of Khomeini and the late Ayatollah Mohammad Bakr Al Hakim hung banners declaring, NO TO AMERICA, NO TO ISRAEL, NO TO OCCUPATION. Two blocks away in the central market, vendors sold posters not of moderate Iraqi Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani, but of Supreme Leader Khamenei. By January 2004, Zainab Al Suwaij, the granddaughter of Basra's leading religious figure, was reporting that Hezbollah, which has close ties to the Revolutionary Guards, was operating openly in southern towns like Nasiriya and Basra, helping to stir up violence. The next day, at his daily press briefing, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said, "No, I don't know anything about Hamas and Hezbollah in Iraq. ... We'll stop them if we can get them." Coincidentally, I visited Basra on January 14 without informing the local CPA coordinator. One block from the main market, SCIRI and Hezbollah had established a joint office. A large Lebanese Hezbollah flag fluttered in the wind.

The Iranian government has not limited its support to a single faction or party. Rather, Tehran's strategy appears to be to support both the radicals seeking immediate confrontation with the U.S. occupation and Islamist political parties like SCIRI and Ibrahim Jafari's Dawa Party, which are willing to sit on the U.S.-backed Iraqi Governing Council and engage with Washington, at least in the short term. The Iranian journalist Nurizadeh wrote in April 2003, "[President Mohammed] Khatami [and other Iranian political leaders] ... were surprised by the decision issued above their heads to send into Iraq more than 2,000 fighters, clerics, and students [to] the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq and al-Da'wah Party." My own experience backed up his claims. This February, I spoke with a local governor from southern Iraq who wanted to meet me after he learned that I lived and worked outside CPA headquarters. The governor complained that the CPA was doing little to stop the influx of Iranian money to district councilmen and prominent tribal and religious officials. The money, he said, was distributed through Dawa offices established after a meeting between Jafari and Iranian security officials.

Twice in the last twelve years, large-scale Iranian destabilization efforts have confronted U.S. military interventions. In Bosnia, after significant internal debate, George H.W. Bush's administration chose to block Iranian infiltration, risking revenge attacks against the United States by Iranian-linked terrorists. In September 1992, Tehran attempted to ship 4,000 guns, one million rounds of ammunition, and several dozen fighters to Bosnia. An Iranian Boeing 747 landed in Zagreb, where, in response to U.S. pressure, the Croatian military impounded the weapons and expelled the jihadis. Today, there is little threat of radical anti-U.S. Islamism in Bosnia.

Almost a decade later, the current Bush administration identified an Iranian challenge in Afghanistan. Speaking before the American-Iranian Council on March 13, 2002, Zalmay Khalilzad, senior National Security Council adviser for the Middle East and Southwest Asia, declared, "The Iranian regime has sent some Qods forces associated with its Revolutionary Guards to parts of Afghanistan. ... Iranian officials have provided military and financial support to regional parties without the knowledge and consent of the Afghan Interim Authority." Rather than combat this Iranian challenge, the Bush administration chose diplomacy. "Notwithstanding our criticism of Iranian policy, the U.S. remains open to dialogue," Khalilzad continued. Today, visitors to Herat, a main city in western Afghanistan, consider Iranian influence there to be extremely strong.

In the wake of Sadr's uprising, Washington is faced with the same choice: End Iran's infiltration through forceful action, or wish it away. How long can we afford to keep choosing the latter? ■

Najaf Dispatch

Preoccupied

BY JOSHUA HAMMER

MOQTADA AL SADR'S headquarters is a crumbling, two-story tenement in a back alley in the holy city of Najaf, a few hundred meters from the main entrance to the Shrine of the Imam Ali. A narrow flight of stairs leads to the cleric's office from a ground-floor madrassa, or Islamic school, where black-turbaned followers spend as many as 15 hours per day studying the Koran. Sadr receives visitors in a bare-walled cell on the second floor, devoid of decoration except for a poster of his father, Ayatollah Mohammed Al Sadr, who was murdered, along with two of Moqtada's brothers, by Saddam Hussein's henchmen in 1999.

I first met the young cleric in this headquarters a year

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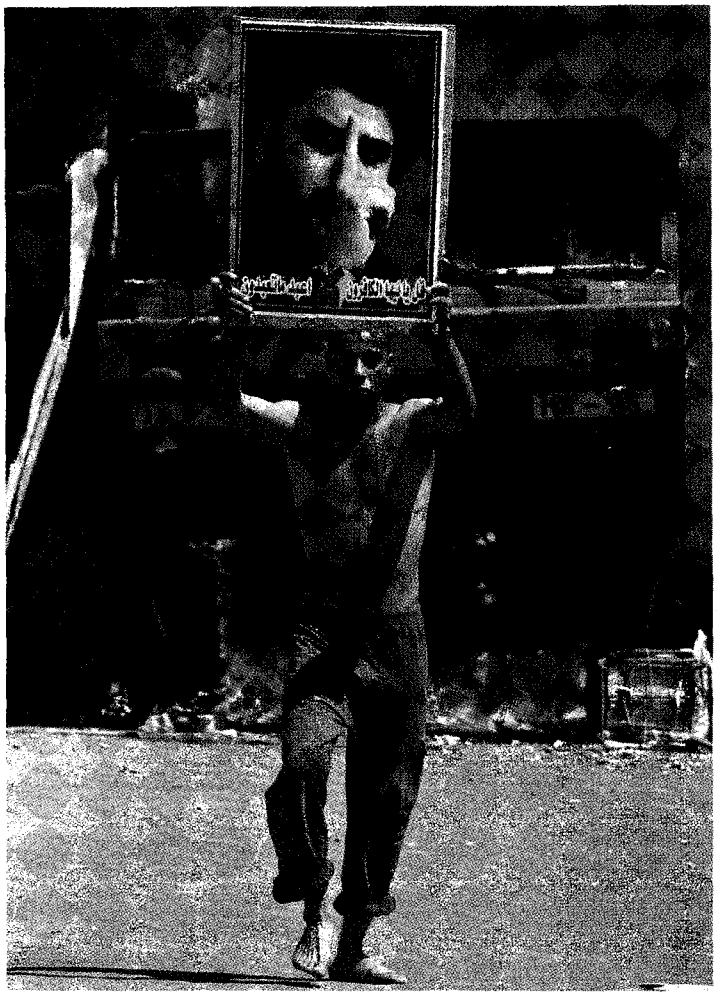

The Bush administration fielded thousands of Iraqi police before they had developed a commitment to each other and a democratic Iraq. During last week's uprising, it showed.

ago, just as he was beginning his campaign to become the most powerful Shia leader in Iraq. Two bearded, black-robed assistants carrying Kalashnikovs ushered me up a dank flight of stairs to his spartan room, where I waited 15 minutes for the cleric to arrive. Then Sadr stepped into the room. He had a boyish face, piercing brown eyes, and yellowing, chipped front teeth. Even in those early days of the occupation, his animosity toward the coalition forces was apparent. When I asked Sadr if he was grateful to the United States for ridding the country of Saddam, he scowled at me. "We are grateful to God for what has happened," he said. "We refuse any relationship with the United States." Then I asked him about the murder one week earlier of Majid Al Khoie, a moderate Shia cleric who had returned from exile in London with CIA backing to help coalition forces rebuild the city. Khoie had been stabbed and shot at the gate of the Shrine of Imam Ali on April 10, 2003—a crime, according to many eyewitnesses, ordered by Sadr, who considered Khoie a puppet of the Americans. "These killers were not my followers," Sadr insisted. Did Sadr have anything to do with the murder, which had been carried out meters from his doorstep? "I sent five people to drive the murderers away, but they were beaten," he replied. "I wanted to come out myself, but I was afraid." I pressed Sadr on Khoie's murder, but the cleric cut me off. "He's gone," he said, with a dismissive flick of his wrist. "Why talk about him?" Then he threw me out of the room.

As it turned out, Khoie's murder was an issue that would not go away. On April 3, after nearly a year of delay, coalition troops arrested Sadr's deputy, Mustafa Yaqoubi, on charges of complicity in the killing. The arrest, which followed the March 28 closure of Sadr's newspaper, *Al Hawza*, in Baghdad, sparked the most violent protests in Shia regions of Iraq since Saddam's fall a year ago. Sadr unleashed his Al Mahdi Army—a 10,000-man, highly disciplined force—in an all-out uprising against the U.S.-led occupation. The militia seized control of government buildings and police stations in four Iraqi towns, and fought days of street battles with American troops.

The Shia uprising is the disastrous result of a year of miscalculations by L. Paul Bremer and his associates. Isolated in the Green Zone in Baghdad, and ill-informed about Sadr's military muscle, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was essentially presented with two options in dealing with the upstart cleric. One course was to try to bring the cleric into the fold of the occupation. The other was to crack down hard on the cleric and his supporters early on, trying to silence Sadr before his support swelled. Unfortunately, the CPA did neither.

IT WAS CLEAR from the first days of the occupation that Sadr's challenge would have to be addressed. Little known to Iraqis when the war began, he burst into prominence immediately after the 101st Airborne Division stormed into Najaf in April 2003; Sadr unleashed a series of fiery speeches against the U.S. occupation from his late father's mosque in Kufa. Then came the killing of Khoie. A dozen eyewitnesses said the attackers had chanted, "Long live Moqtada Al Sadr!" as they surrounded Khoie; many identified the leader of the mob as Sheik Riyadh, the manager of Sadr's office. "Moqtada Al Sadr knew everything," someone close to Sadr told me when I interviewed him in an alley in Najaf a few days after the murder. "Al Sadr asked his people not to attack Al Khoie inside the holy shrine—he said, 'Take him outside, and do it there.'" In the aftermath of the killing, the moderate Shia leader Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani became so frightened of

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Sadr that he barricaded himself inside his Najaf home, protected by armed tribesmen.

I got a glimpse of Sadr's magnetism days after Khoie's killing. Five of the cleric's bodyguards escorted me past 30,000 worshipers baking in the sun in the Kufa mosque's outdoor courtyard to the foot of the podium where the cleric was about to speak after Friday prayers. Clad in a white burial shroud in commemoration of his father, he railed against liquor stores and women who wore jewelry, and vowed to drive out the American occupiers "as soon as God allows it." It was clear from a few moments in his presence that the cleric had a flair for the theatrical and a messianic view of himself. "I will wear this burial shroud until my death, to confront the evil that surrounds us," he told me, before being hustled off to his battered Toyota through a crowd of frenzied admirers.

From that point, Sadr's appeal grew steadily, heightened by coalition missteps. After Khoie's murder, senior CPA officials, who rarely left central Baghdad, had little sense of how strong Sadr's following was. Unsure, the CPA debated how to handle Sadr, with some wanting to arrest him. Others wanted to bring Sadr into the Iraqi Governing Council, the organization being set up by the United States as an interim ruling body. This would have done much, proponents argued, to allay the Sadr camp's fears that they were being shut out of power by the occupation authorities and could have turned a die-hard enemy into a potential ally. But, after lengthy negotiations involving other Shia leaders—including Sistani—Sadr and his allies were left out of the governing body. Almost immediately, the cleric stepped up his anti-CPA diatribe, demanded that American forces pull out of Iraq, and launched the Al Mahdi Army.

Yet the CPA, having decided not to bring Sadr into the fold, did not choose the other course either. Sources in Najaf told me the occupation authorities had information as early as mid-April 2003 that Khoie had been murdered at Sadr's behest. More than a dozen eyewitnesses accused Sadr of ordering the attack. Even Sadr's own aides openly stated that they were acting on the cleric's orders in the murder. But, inside the Green Zone, occupation authorities were reluctant to move. In August, they managed to obtain an arrest warrant from an Iraqi judge for Sadr, his top aide, and eleven others in connection with the Khoie killing. Yet Bremer and other CPA officials elected not to exercise the warrants. No American forces came to jail the cleric, and the Americans' failure heightened Sadr's mystique among the Shia and almost certainly enhanced his sense of his own power.

Sadr's Al Mahdi Army grew quickly and muscled its way into control of mosques across southern Iraq. Controlling those mosques meant gaining access to hundreds of thousands of dollars in contributions left by Shia pilgrims. Last October, the Al Mahdi Army fought a pitched battle with supporters of Sistani in Karbala, after Sadr's militia forcibly attempted to take over the golden-domed shrines of Hussein and Abbas, two of the most sacred figures for the Shia. A few days later, three American troops were killed in a street battle in Karbala with Sadr's militiamen after they attempted to disarm the gunmen outside the home of one of Sadr's top lieutenants. Seven Iraqi Al Mahdi soldiers were killed in the shootout and a dozen injured. "Tell the Americans that this is the beginning of the war, and we will never stop until we get revenge," one of Sadr's gunmen told reporters.

Despite ample evidence that the Al Mahdi Army was becoming a dangerous, disciplined force, the CPA still refused to act. And, when it did, its actions often backfired. I witnessed one defining moment last August in Sadr City, the teeming Shia slum on Baghdad's outskirts. As a U.S. military helicopter hovered above a communications tower festooned with green and black Shia banners honoring Imam Ali and his son, Imam Hussein, an American soldier leaned from the cockpit and ripped off one of the banners. Shia viewed the action as an insult to their religion, and 1,000 people poured into the streets of Sadr City to protest.

Even as Sadr's brigades were becoming a serious threat to stability, the CPA did little to equip or train the Iraqi security forces that might have helped stop his army, especially in the Shia south. In Al Amarah, for instance, a city of 300,000 along the Tigris River, British troops last year cobbled together a makeshift police force consisting of former cops from the Baathist regime and mujahedin who had waged sporadic attacks against those same police in the '90s from their bases across the Iranian border. It was an unhappy marriage, a British major supervising the police told me. "You've got discredited cops from Saddam's time—who at least knew the law—with bandits who fought and rescued the place but can't write their own names," he said. The two forces occupied different buildings, rarely spoke to each other, and were woefully underequipped. During my visit to Al Amarah, I encountered a night patrol consisting of 17 cops in mismatched uniforms driving through the streets in an aging pickup truck. The acting CPA chief in Al Amarah asked for money, but his superiors in Baghdad didn't listen. With the Sunni-led resistance gathering strength around Falluja, Al Amarah, like the rest of southern Iraq, wasn't deemed a priority.

But Al Amarah was anything but stable, as events that autumn revealed. A week before my arrival in town, Al Amarah's police chief was shot dead after prayers at a mosque controlled by Sadr's followers. Sadr's people denied any involvement. "He walked out of the mosque, then we heard bullets, and the man escaped," one Sadr-linked cleric told me. But, the evening after the assassination, policemen burst into Sadr's headquarters, fired guns into the ceiling, and abducted two of Sadr's clerics and held them overnight. Before the clerics were released, Sadr's militia and Iraqi police fought an hours-long gun battle across the Tigris. The fighting only ended when British troops rolled

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into town with heavy armor.

Al Amarah wasn't the only city in the Shia heartland that was falling into the grip of Sadr's forces well before the April uprising. Two months ago, I visited Nasiriya, a dismal sprawl of cinderblock buildings linked by a suspension bridge over the Euphrates River—the scene of a fierce battle between the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division and Saddam's fedayeen in April 2003. Once the epicenter of resistance to Saddam, Nasiriya was now a textbook case of the costs of neglect and war. Nasiriya had welcomed the coalition forces, but now anger and frustration were growing. Protesters gathered daily outside government ministries demanding jobs. The week before my arrival, 10,000 demonstrators led by Sadr's militia had besieged Nasiriya's governor in provincial headquarters, denouncing as illegitimate the 36-member provincial council—appointed by the coalition—and demanding popular elections. The warm feeling that had greeted the foreign troops who first came to Nasiriya was a distant memory.

Coalition officials had done little to improve Nasiriya, and, by failing to bring tangible improvements to Sadr's Shia strongholds, they fed a deepening resentment of the occupation. "We need a hundred and fifty million dollars to restore basic services here, and we haven't gotten any of it yet," one British engineer in the city admitted. With the CPA all but absent, many people were turning to militias for help. One of the most influential was the Badr Brigades, the armed wing of Abdul Aziz Hakim's Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. At their bullet-pocked office, formerly Nasiriya's Baath Party headquarters, I watched supplicants line up to receive crisp new $50 bills from a Badr official. The money, I was later told by coalition officials, almost certainly came from Iran (see Michael Rubin, "Bad Neighbor," page 19).

Meanwhile, pro-Sadr graffiti was everywhere in the city. WE DECRAY THE ITALIAN ATTAECK AGAINST THE PICTURE OF OUR LEADER AL SADR, proclaimed poorly spelled messages splattered on walls, a reference to a recent incident in which carabinieri had torn down posters of the radical cleric from government buildings. At Friday prayers in an outdoor mosque beside the Euphrates, I watched at least 1,000 worshipers—almost all of them young men—gather before Sheik Aws Al Khafaji, director of the Sadr organization's southern offices. Khafaji, the leader of demonstrations against the provincial council, pulled a curved sword from a golden scabbard and waved it in the air in front of his followers. "No America, no Israel," he cried. The crowd roared its approval. The sheik launched into a vigorous denunciation of Bremer, making a pun on the Arabic words *safeer*, meaning ambassador, and *safer*, meaning an unreliable person. Lurking on the sidelines, I noticed, were a dozen Kalashnikov-carrying members of Sadr's Mahdi Army.

Iraqi officials I spoke to in Nasiriya understood the fragility of the situation, even if the Americans in Baghdad didn't appear to. "All these militias carry weapons, and we're too weak to do anything about it," admitted the deputy police chief. "They have everything—machine guns, missile launchers, rockets. Me? I've got an old Kalashnikov with twenty bullets." Governor Sabri Rumayidh, who had brought armed tribesmen into the provincial headquarters for protection against Sadr's rampaging demonstrators, said that the radical cleric's militia could explode at any time. "The demonstrators had lots of guns," he told me. "If my people hadn't arrived at the right moment, it could have turned violent. We could have had a lot of people dead in the streets." Two months later, Rumayidh's worst nightmare became reality. Sadr's army seized government buildings in Nasiriya and battled Italian troops across the Euphrates. A dozen people reportedly died in the fighting, which spread across Shia areas.

IT'S TOO EARLY to say whether the coalition has lost the Shia for good. In recent months, Sadr's support has surged across southern Iraq—especially among unemployed Shia males frustrated by the slow pace of improvements and enamored of the anti-Western, empowering messages of radical Islam. But he also faces strong opposition. Most Shia I've talked to during the past year, in fact, distrust Sadr; dislike his strong ties to radical Iranian clerics; and are fearful that, if he gains too much power, he will drive away investment and plunge the country into even deeper instability. Significantly, the Fifteenth of Shaban Islamic Movement, a popular Shia militia in the south whose fighters carried out the assassination attempt against Uday Hussein in December 1996 that left him crippled, refused to join Sadr's army in the recent uprising. This militia has repositioned itself as a moderate, secular political group. But it lacks a charismatic leader like Sadr and has often seemed to lack the political instincts of Sadr's group. When Sadr's representatives in Nasiriya launched their vocal campaign to dismiss the CPA-appointed provincial council, for example, the Fifteenth of Shaban movement initially resisted—then meekly joined the crusade when it garnered huge popular support.

The danger is that, if the CPA cracks down hard against Sadr and his Al Mahdi Army, the rebel cleric or his surrogates will use the onslaught to further whip up anti-occupation sentiments and isolate Shia moderates. While many Shia would no doubt welcome the elimination of Sadr and his thugs, a large number, perhaps, could be drawn to the barricades in support, much as Shia flocked to aid the beleaguered Sunni insurgents in Falluja. Unless the coalition can combine an attack on the rebel cleric with an ambitious campaign to win back the hearts and minds of the Shia population—a massive jobs program and millions of desperately needed dollars poured into the desperate neighborhoods where Sadr has drawn his support—it could well face a nightmare scenario, a spreading campaign of resistance across the Shia south. Then Moqtada Al Sadr wouldn't have to hide anymore. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Town Limits

WHATEVER ELSE HE may lack, Lars von Trier has mastery of at least one thing: self-promotion. In 1995 this Danish director, then thirty-nine and little known, stood up at a Paris film conference and pronounced that for the past ten years film had been rubbish. He then threw pamphlets into the audience. The pamphlets heralded a new film mode—an ethics, really—that von Trier and some other Danes had forged. It was called Dogma 95, and it abjured technical adornments, declaring that all shooting must be done in natural light, all sound recording must be direct, and so on, in simplification. These moves would presumably rid the film world of rubbish. The fact that this self-styled "Vow of Chastity" condemned many of the best films in the world's treasury, that some of the most talented film-makers would be hobbled by this creed, registered not at all. Bravura carried the day. Von Trier's public show achieved what to some of us seemed its prime purpose: to put him (and, to a lesser extent, his colleagues) on the map.

The film of his that came along the next year (not the first he had made) was in English: *Breaking the Waves*, a love story so breathlessly overheated and unconventional that it brushed the ridiculous—and also tampered with the Dogma code. Nonetheless, the mantle of genius, in some measure self-bestowed, rested on von Trier. His next film, also in English, *Dancer in the Dark*, was set in the Pacific Northwest (though he had never been to America) and gave us the singer Björk and the actress Catherine Deneuve as factory workers who got involved in a tricky plot. (Adieu, Dogma.) Still, von Trier, buoyed by heat and exaggeration, his eccentricities confirming for some his genius, continued to bask in the renown he had acquired in 1995.

Now he has reached a pinnacle. His new film, **DOGVILLE**, again in English, is a very dubious work (the doubts follow), but it has provoked stormy discussion. How happy von Trier must be. Perhaps more people will read about the picture than will see it, but he can relish his currency as a hot film topic. Possibly he doesn't care greatly what people think of him as long as they talk about him. (Will they connect the picture's title with Dogma?) For my part, I concede a bit grudgingly that he has to be discussed.

The prime issue of the controversy is the charge that *Dogville* is anti-American. I wish it were. Quickly I add that I also wish it were at least cogent and angry instead of flapping around in a series of wormy episodes. In these episodes people who are only incidentally American are revealed as less nice than they seemed at first. Is this an American monopoly? Insofar as one can find any specifically anti-American sting in the picture, it is at the level of Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* and is just about as fresh. Many a night David Letterman says something that cuts deeper into American defects. (Note: von Trier still hasn't been to America.)

The one genuinely interesting element of the film has been least discussed: its scenic style. Von Trier, the fervent cinephile, has used the theater, openly theatrical, to give his film individuality. At the start we look down on a large floor plan spread on a wide studio floor, with white lines on a dark background marking the location of houses and streets in this town called Dogville. It is in the Rocky Mountains, and the time is the Depression, says the omnipresent narrator. As the camera descends, people begin to appear in those blueprint streets and rooms, along with bits of furniture. The film proceeds at floor level in this minimalist fashion so that everything has the air of a theater rehearsal on a marked-out stage before the sets arrive. Add that the lighting is completely theatrical—not cinematically fixed for any one scene, but constantly changing, swelling, diminishing, as it often does in the theater. At best this theatricalization helps the episodes to trudge along after one another without transitional material. But it is only a sterile conceit: it doesn't help to evoke or to create a theme.

The artsy mumbo-jumbo begins before the film itself as a credit tells us that the picture is in a prologue and nine chapters. Each chapter then has a quasi-Brechtian announcement of intent. To Dogville comes a harried young woman named Grace, who is fleeing gangsters. She is befriended by a would-be writer in the town named Thomas Edison Jr. (His father is a doctor, not the inventor.) He persuades the town—about fifteen people in all—to take Grace in and shelter her. Grace's residence in the town leads her to a range of experiences: helping in a shop, helping to teach, helping to pick apples, and more. She and Tom begin an affair, less out of passion than proximity, and in the course of events she is raped a couple of times by other men, and in time becomes a sexual utility for almost all the town's males. This has very little visible effect on Grace, who, between beddings, is the person she has always been—mildly puzzled, basically placid.

What all these adventures are meant to dramatize—about her, about the townsfolk, about America—is difficult to discern. The finish brings a surprise that is utterly irrelevant to what has taken us three hours to watch. If we have suspected, even hoped, that the film is some sort of religious allegory—a refugee from the world finds a heavenly haven that turns out to be hellish—it is demolished by the ending.

And the ending is not the end. Under the closing credits we see a lot of photos of Depression-era America in the middle of which Richard Nixon makes a startling appearance. The relation of the wretched people in the photos to those

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actorish Dogville folk in their theater setting is nil; and, villainous though Nixon is to some of us, this reminder of his villainy is irrelevant here.

All through the film a narrator explains and links elements for us. That narration is written in prose that beggars parody: when Grace becomes sexually available to many, the voice tells us that she offers "a provision of carnality." The narrator is John Hurt, a beautiful speaker but as British as possible. Why a Brit for this American setting? Anyway, how well does von Trier know English? That narration and the film's often insipid dialogue suggest a distance between his writing and our language. Anthony Dod Mantle did the cinematography, which frequently is handheld and whips around in a manner that has little to do with what is happening. In fact, this thoroughly filmic method contradicts the theater setting. And that setting, done by Peter Grant, is as dated as much else, a reminder of the scenic avant-garde of the 1920s.

Some familiar actor faces float through as the townsfolk: Lauren Bacall, Patricia Clarkson, Stellan Skarsgård, Ben Gazzara. Grace and Tom are played by Nicole Kidman and Paul Bettany, two fat-free actors: they don't do us any harm, but they don't have much flavor. Still, full-bodied performances would be out of place in von Trier's disembodied, patchy, pointless work, which isn't even successfully pretentious. ■

Jackson Lears

The Resurrection of the Body

Medicine and the pursuit of happiness in America.

I.

ONCE UPON A TIME, THE life of the mind required the renunciation of the body. Professors, like their monkish predecessors, were assumed to inhabit a world of bloodless abstraction, remote from the messy animality of muscle, flesh, and bone. This was the cloud-cuckoo-land that Jonathan Swift satirized as Laputa in *Gulliver's Travels*. For two centuries to come, novelists populated their work with spectral scholars, from Casaubon in *Middlemarch* to the Shakespearean pedants in *Ulysses*. Professors were pallid figures, it seemed, inert to the rhythms of bodily experience and "dead from the waist down," in Robert Browning's withering phrase.

How times have changed. While libidinous academics have become familiar characters in fiction and in film, professors themselves have discovered that "the discourse of the body" is central to the discourse of the humanities. Intellectuals, for so long assumed to be indifferent to their bodies, now seem able to talk of little else. For centuries the body had to be content with bit parts and supporting roles in the drama of cultural history, a victim of Cartesian prejudice; but in the past two decades it has taken the lead as a locus of meaning where struggles are constantly fought out. Hundreds of articles and monographs dissect the body's significance as an arena for social performance, a site for the assertion of personal identity.

In part, this preoccupation is a sign of the times. Scholarly fashions parallel popular obsessions, and seldom has the body been loaded with so much cultural freight as in the contemporary United States. Ordinary Americans may be grayer and flabbier than ever, but they are also surrounded by more images of conventional perfection, which is made all the more attainable (or so it seems) by plastic surgery, hormone replacement therapy, and other "enhancement technologies." A recent issue of *Newsweek* presented "The Perfect Face," presumably embodied by the stunning but robotic cover girl, "supermodel Saira Mohan," who is "part Indian, part French, and part Irish." Inside we learn "How a Global Standard of Beauty Is Emerging and What People Are Doing to Get It." The people in question turn out to be Asian women, who are undergoing multiple plastic surgeries to lengthen their faces and make their cheeks more angular. Though the obligatory reference to Mohan's multicultural ancestry blends exoticism and political correctness, the "global standard" turns out to be once again culturally coercive, and once again Western.

Tarted up in the latest fashions and harnessed to the latest technologies, the pursuit of physical perfection is, of course, not new. On both sides of the Atlantic, tabloid media have been trotting out perfect faces and bodies for more than a century, from the "professional beauties" of the Edwardian stage to the live-action Barbies of the current modeling scene. But body worship has an especially complex history in American culture. From the earliest colonial times, the Protestants who shaped our mainstream morality shared a deep distrust of surface effects. Beauty was proverbially "only skin deep," and true perfection was an inward state—one that the godly aspired to but only fitfully attained. Officially, the perfectionist project locked the individual in combat with his baser impulses, in the sight of God alone. But even the most

FLESH WOUNDS: THE CULTURE OF COSMETIC SURGERY
By Virginia L. Blum
(University of California Press, 356 pp., $29.95)

THE PURSUIT OF PERFECTION: THE PROMISES AND PERILS OF MEDICAL ENHANCEMENT
By Sheila M. Rothman and David J. Rothman
(Pantheon Books, 292 pp., $25)

OUR OWN DEVICES: THE PAST AND FUTURE OF BODY TECHNOLOGY
By Edward Tenner
(Alfred A. Knopf, 314 pp., $26)

Jackson Lears is the editor of RARITAN *and the author, most recently, of* SOMETHING FOR NOTHING: LUCK IN AMERICA *(Viking/Penguin).*

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fervent Protestants could not help but suspect that a successful inner struggle might reveal itself to human observers. Under the gaze of the righteous community, the pursuit of perfection became a public performance—not a theatrical performance, since that would have conjured the specter of insincerity, but a performance of hard and highly visible work. The Protestant ethic created lives of constant self-correction, pervaded by a preoccupation with will, choice, and moral responsibility.

By the early nineteenth century, the perfectionist project began to encompass flesh as well as spirit. In a secularizing commercial society, the Calvinist heritage of self-distrust became focused on the body as well as the soul. The body was not only a timeless temple of the soul, a spiritual subject, but an object, too—a *thing* to be tinkered with, maintained, and improved. Patent medicine advertisers urged their customers to worry as much about the state of their bowels as the state of their souls, and to long for physical as well as moral regeneration. The rise of a modern market society, pervaded by anonymous transactions and dominated by large corporations, made a conventionally pleasing physical appearance ever more essential to success.

The advertising industry has reinforced this imperative. Since the early twentieth century, advertisers have encouraged Americans to fear the fateful effluvia of a badly managed body—bad breath and body odor, flatulence and five o'clock shadow. The reward for good management was perpetual adolescence—personified now for nearly half a century by beach-bound boys and girls swilling Pepsi and slipping into dangerous transports of ecstasy. In the terminally hip world of global capitalism, even youth culture is old hat; but the ritualized exuberance obscures persistent anxiety. In the social universe created by advertising and mass media, as in the righteous communities of old, the individual is under constant surveillance; self-scrutiny complements the appraising gaze of others. The pursuit of physical perfection is charged with moral meaning, and, as in Puritan times, the pilgrim's work is never done.

So bodies have carried meaning for a long time, in America as elsewhere. Why intellectuals have only recently noticed this is an interesting question. Certainly the body's symbolic importance intensified as other sites of significance slipped away. Though Americans have been lamenting the decline of community ever since William Bradford set foot on Plymouth Rock, there is no doubt that social ties loosened with the resurgence of laissez-faire individualism in the last several decades. Workplaces, families, churches, neighborhoods—the places where meanings are made—became more difficult for many Americans to find or to sustain. Amid increasing mobility and anonymity, the body was left to take on heavier cultural burdens.

But there was also a political dimension to the discourse of the body, especially on the academic left. The outpouring of scholarship on the body reflected the shrinkage of social hope and the rise of identity politics. These developments contained a fundamental contradiction. Scholars of cultural studies deconstructed the natural, arguing that such allegedly immutable categories as race and sex were socially constructed, not biologically given. Yet even while blackness or femaleness was exposed as a mere construction, the experience of being black or female was promoted to the core of one's moral and intellectual authority. In a typical graduate seminar, one could find students both denying and insisting on the significance of bodily markers such as sex organs and skin color. Sometimes these were the same students. The body was at once an all-important source of identity and a curiously phantasmic ideological creation.

The triumph of the discourse of the body marked the ascendancy of Foucault as the chief theorist of power for what remained of the left. In many ways this was a great leap forward from liberationist simplifications. Like Tocqueville and the Frankfurt School Marxists, Foucault saw the instruments of social discipline amid the din of democracy—the capacity of elites to depoliticize dissent by persuading the populace that they wanted to do what they had to do anyway. He recognized that the rhetoric of liberation concealed subtle forms of coercion, which could shape social relations in the most apparently private settings. From Foucault's view, the rise of "sexual science" at the turn of the last century displaced the supposed darkness of ages past with sharper divisions between normality and pathology, as coercive in their claims to scientific neutrality as God-centered moralism had been. The key to the success of this new "regime of truth" was the manipulability of language: under the aegis of Enlightenment, compulsion nearly always masqueraded as choice.

In Foucault's world, there was a multitude of sites where the powerful defined reality and their subordinates accepted (or contested) that definition: hospitals, prisons, workplaces, marriages. But the bedrock was the human body, which was the primary object of re-education, readjustment, rehabilitation, and enhancement—all the clinical proddings of the therapeutic mega-state. Like Weber, Foucault was haunted by the thought that Enlightenment bred enslavement; his most memorable model of modern society was the Panopticon, Jeremy Bentham's design for a prison of total surveillance. But it was not always clear, given Foucault's stress on the constitutive powers of discourse, whether his Panopticon was a structure of concrete and steel or a prisonhouse of language.

The political problems with Foucaultian thought became immediately apparent. Neither he nor his American followers took much account of any middle ground between his bleak vision of society under surveillance and his Nietzschean ideal of an untrammeled self. He allowed no space for politics or resistance, short of an unimaginably open-ended immunity from all norms and values. He set the bar for liberation so high that only a few polymorphous sadomasochists could clamber over it. The effect of this pessimistic perspective was to discredit any form of meliorism, anything short of anarchic individualism, as a snare and a delusion—and, worse, a fraud. No wonder the postmodern left lurched between fantasies of free-floating selfhood and the fear that resistance was futile.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Foucault's lefter-than-thou individualism converged with the free-market fundamentalism of the deregulated marketplace. The spawn of their awkward embrace was a distinctly postmodern creed: laissez-faire with a Nietzschean flair. This outlook united corporate gurus and hip academics in a celebration of restless discontent and a disdain for limits. Indeed, from this perspective the very idea of limits, natural or otherwise, was a creation of puritanical killjoys who were probably un-American besides.

Yet at about the same time, biological determinism was making a comeback, having been revived by evolutionary psychologists for a credulous popular

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audience. The result was a resurgence of the dualism that has characterized the nature-versus-culture debate from the beginning. Outside the postmodern academy, pop-Darwinian theories of behavior acquired renewed authority, especially with respect to gender differences: men were from Mars, women were from Venus, et cetera ad nauseam. Inside the postmodern academy, even cautious biological explanations were forbidden under pain of excommunication, and the body remained sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought—a site of "discursive practice" rather than physical experience.

FORTUNATELY, SERIOUS EFFORTS are under way to restore some complexity to the nature/culture debate—to resurrect the body in all its fleshly actuality while continuing to explore its symbolic meanings. Or so at least these three books suggest. All of them take for granted the modern status of the body as a thing, a project for tinkering. All try to renegotiate the relationship between technology and the body, and to reclaim some middle ground between determinism and freedom. But this turns out to be a tricky business, given the confusions in our public discourse.

The fundamental problem is the difficulty of distinguishing between compulsion and choice, as Foucault and his predecessors understood. One of those predecessors was Orwell, whose notion of Newspeak not only characterizes totalitarian propaganda but also captures the self-canceling rhetoric of consumerist democracy. The key Orwellian word is "we." While it allows the speaker to merge his own interests and worldview with those of "most Americans," it also blurs the boundaries between liberation and coercion. In our current cultural climate, this is only to be expected. A "can do" society in the grip of revived entrepreneurial fervor and imperial delusions has little time to notice helplessness. What we want—or at least what we get, in idioms from cultural theory to tabloid journalism—are tales of triumphant will. Yet this faith in human striving coincides with an equally strong conviction that we are all in the grip of a deterministic process—called progress or providence or globalization or evolution—that we can hardly influence and certainly cannot control. If we have never been freer, it's a good thing, too, because there is no way out.

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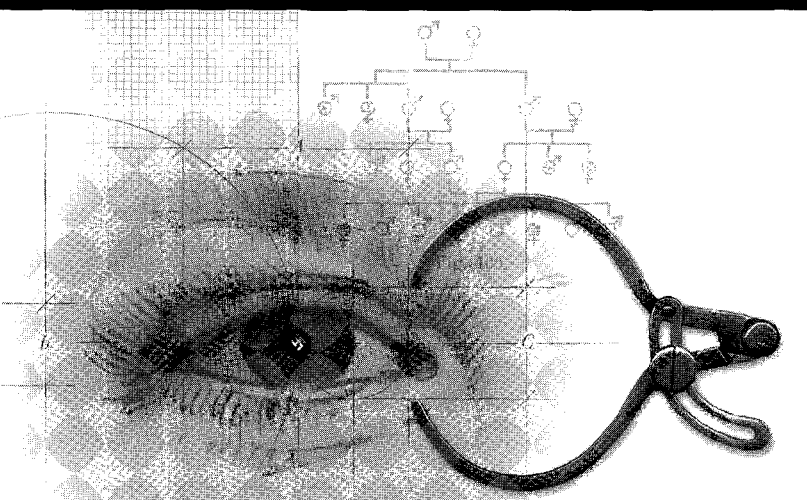

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The yoking of these contradictory assumptions allows everyone from Jean Baudrillard to Bill Gates to reach a common conclusion: we are all autonomously deciding to do what we are fated to do anyway.

Each of these books helps to clarify this muddle without escaping from it altogether. Virginia L. Blum's *Flesh Wounds* explores the interplay of desire and desperation in the subculture of plastic surgery, revealing that patients are more than victims and less than free agents. Sheila M. and David J. Rothman's *The Pursuit of Perfection* begins by deploying the language of consumer choice, describing hormone replacement therapies as a response to popular demand; but their evidence shows how doctors and drug companies have collaborated in feeding popular fantasies of rejuvenation, creating consumers who were anything but well-informed. Edward Tenner's *Our Own Devices* escapes the claustrophobic atmosphere of the clinic to an open-air world where bodies and technologies interact on equal terms, but he acknowledges that the "technological treadmill" can force us to adapt to its rhythms whether we want to or not. None of these interpretations can fully resolve the paradox of compulsion and choice. Yet, taken together, they suggest new and more capacious ways of writing the history of the body. By orchestrating the interplay of human desires and values alongside biological limits, capital investments, and technological blunders or breakthroughs, they reveal that the marriage of freedom and fate is not quite as cozy, or as fated, as it seems.

II.

In *Flesh Wounds*, Virginia L. Blum resorts often to the obfuscation of the first-person plural: "our" longings to look like movie stars, "our" equation of personal identity with surface appearance. But at its best the book burrows deeper. Blum is very plain about its origins in her personal life. She was a middle-class Jewish girl growing up in Southern California; her mother had had a nose job and was determined that her eighteen-year-old daughter would have one, too (even though the daughter was perfectly satisfied with her face). This has been one of the classic American uses of plastic surgery—as a ethnic rite of assimilation into the WASP mainstream, epitomized (especially in Southern California) by the airbrushed perfection of "the stars." The plastic surgeon showed young Virginia a picture of a famous model. "This is what you can look like," he said. Suddenly her head was filled with fantasies of self-transformation. She agreed to the operation, and he botched it. Years later she had her nose fixed by another surgeon. She knows what surgery can and cannot accomplish, and she still feels the seductive pull of the scalpel, still dreams the dream of the perfect makeover. She wants to know why. So the book is partly a journey of self-discovery—an often thoughtful one at that. It is also a shrewd analysis of the subculture of plastic surgery.

But problems arise when Blum leaps from that subculture to society as a whole. Without question, in recent years the profession of plastic surgery has multiplied its practitioners, expanded its constituency, and diversified its techniques. Its cultural meanings have become more complicated: crude racial valences are out (despite the persistent WASP hegemony in facial structure), the narcissism of minor differences is in. Plastic surgeons are inventing an infinity of imperfections for a fragmented consumerist culture. Doubtless the spread of plastic surgery suggests that people of both sexes have become more preoccupied with how they look—sometimes pathologically so. But surely it does not mean that "little by little, we are all becoming movie stars—internally framed by a camera eye," as Blum writes.

Little by little, Blum and her friends begin to constitute a universal norm. Like other intellectuals in the postmodern academy, they are determined to flaunt their fascination with the cheesiest mass entertainment. They read *The National Enquirer*, keep up with soap operas, gossip about which stars have most recently been "done." "We not only like makeover stories," she writes, "we also believe them." For her, "our fascination with cosmetic surgery" is of a piece with "our ongoing and evidently insatiable desire for more information" about celebrities (particularly "surgical" celebrities): both impulses express "our" status as subjects in a two-dimensional empire of images.

This is the postmodern version of the Orwellian "we." We are all the beneficiaries of fluid identities, endlessly reinventing ourselves (or our companies), cavorting in the proliferation of mass-marketed images. Not all is well in this world, but even if we wanted to complain, we would have no business doing so, because we inhale the same cultural atmosphere. So we have no objective standpoint from which to criticize the culture we inhabit. To pretend that we did would resurrect the delusion that there is a "view from nowhere" (in Thomas Nagel's influential phrase) and the even more damaging assumption that we (intellectuals) know more about culture than the readers of *People* magazine.

In short, resistance is futile. The image empire is omnipresent. Do not be misled into thinking that you can protect your children from its effects, and do not try to depend on the old romantic ideals of authenticity. There is no "real" body struggling beneath the ceaseless assaults of imagery. "When identity itself is fashioned (and incessantly refashioned) in relation to these transient cultural images, how can we speak of any kind of premedia, premeditated body? What authentic body is left to preserve or liberate?" And don't assume that heavier, less pretty, less perfect images will help. "From a Foucauldian perspective," Blum quotes a cultural studies scholar, "the 'resistant' body ... is no less a product of cultural discipline than the dominated body, the body of 'gender normalization.' " Finally, "the subjects who 'submit' to images are the selfsame subjects who create them," so the old vocabulary of domination and subordination does not work anymore. "We" are all powerful and we are all powerless.

From this exquisitely confused perspective, why not play by the rules of a body-obsessed society and win for a change? Plastic surgery, says another authority in cultural studies, is "a form of agency for women in an obdurately appearance-centered culture." Besides, nothing is really real anymore, not even one's own flesh. Or so Blum implies when she writes that "people who have been raised to idealize and identify with two-dimensional images are well-prepared to become surgical. It's easy for us to go under the knife, because it doesn't really seem like a knife after all." This bizarre line of thought, if one can call it that, is consistent with certain postmodern theorists, notably Baudrillard. Blum cites him frequently on "the triumph of the simulacra," summarizing his view succinctly: "As the three-dimensional landscape takes orders from screen images, movie stars and their cinematic lives can seem more primordially authentic than one's own life and one's own body." Tempting

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as it is to dismiss this hyperbole outright, it is worth acknowledging that Baudrillard has a point. For decades, mass entertainment has provided vicariously intense experiences to modern people mired in boredom and futility. But to grant this "hyper-reality" an ontological status is to leap into the void of postmodern metaphysics.

STILL, EVEN AS WE BACK AWAY from the precipice, we are entitled to ask how we got here. Even if only some of us inhabit a dematerialized, two-dimensional universe, the obsession with manipulable surfaces has a history. When Blum attends to it, however speculatively, her argument gets interesting. Both plastic surgery and post-Freudian psychoanalysis, she suggests, arose to heal the wounds of an individualist culture—one in which the price for a separate self is "an ongoing but manageable experience of object loss." The body becomes a site of mourning for lost love objects, and plastic surgery a means of reclaiming an estranged mother, a straying spouse, or one's own youthful beauty. The project has become more urgent, she argues, as Americans have become detached from social sources of identity—family, church, neighborhood.

This familiar sociological theme captures something important (though not unprecedented) about recent American history. For many contemporary Americans, hoping to belong and to succeed, the endless refashioning of the body may be all that is left to fall back on. "Does this body take over for family ties? Does it become our home?" Blum asks. The sad answer, in many cases, is yes. Plastic surgery is a form of home renovation.

But the job is never done. Blum's recognition of this is rooted in her own self-knowledge, as well as her interviews with patients and surgeons. Admitting that plastic surgery sometimes makes people happier, she nevertheless captures the pathos of the endless losing battle against imperfection, the desperate compulsion to repeat and to refine procedures that are bound to result in disappointment. Despite her preoccupation with two-dimensional images, she acknowledges that the knives and the pain are real, and that plastic surgery may be "like any other practice that has us offering up our bodies to the psychical intensities that angrily grip us." Blum also realizes how silly the idiom of consumer choice is when applied to physical appearance. "What I 'want' for my appearance is inscribed in the culture that shows me, everywhere I turn, what is supposed to be my ideal image ... drastically underweight twenty-year-olds with enormous hardened silicone breast implants ... a comic-strip heroine made flesh."

What we have here is the ideal of a reincarnated righteous community, surveying the pursuit of physical perfection with the same unyielding scrutiny that Protestants once applied to the quest for salvation. Success demands a systematic exercise of will, a self-discipline with moral implications, a constant itch for self-correction. Internal commitments are reinforced by external surveillance. The struggle takes place under the eyes of others. Plastic surgeons, mostly male, construct "a particular kind of reality populated with bodies requiring correction." Women are surveillant, too—as capable as men of the withering observation and the glib appraisal. It may be a little melodramatic to call this claustrophobic social climate "a narcissistic hell of unresolved rivalry with ideal counterparts." But it is also astute.

III.

SHEILA AND DAVID ROTHMAN are less inclined to recognize the role of the oppressive, surveillant others. *The Pursuit of Perfection* begins by asserting that since hormone replacement therapy is what the people want, it would be anti-democratic as well as pointless to resist their relentless desires for revitalization. Fortunately, the Rothmans are scrupulous historians, and their book tells a story more persuasive than the triumph of popular choice. It skillfully documents the convergence of careerism, capital investment, and compliant regulatory policy in the promotion of untested drugs among an unsuspecting populace. Like Blum (and Foucault), the Rothmans understand that physicians and drug companies have a certain power over patients and purchasers: the power of superior knowledge about the procedure or product in question. In medicine (even more flagrantly than in other economic transactions), the concept of a sovereign consumer is a dangerous fiction.

The Rothmans insist that the drive to enhancement is so deeply rooted in our science and our culture that no social, political, or religious objections will withstand it. The heart of the matter is "the futility of trying to separate cure from

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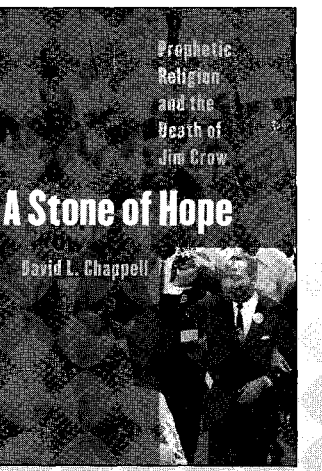

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enhancement" at this point in our history. For the last hundred years, the catalogue of conditions that require a doctor's intervention has expanded hugely. Is short stature a disease? Muscular weakness in seventy-five-year-olds? Crooked noses? Bulging thighs? Or are they simply conditions that make us unhappy? It doesn't matter, as the Rothmans observe, because "twentieth-century medicine is comfortable taking happiness as its province."

Bracketing any discussion of psychiatry and psychoactive drugs, the Rothmans leave a key question unasked: who gets to define happiness? Their implicit answer is "we." The first-person plural is rarely spoken in their book, but it is essential to their interpretation. They attribute the spread of medical enhancement to the "heightened individualism" of late twentieth-century American culture, but they fail to observe that what looks like individualism can be dictated by a drive to meet standardized fantasies of perfection. Like Blum, they conflate their own norms with those of the larger society. Consider this statement: "Novel technologies may be able to improve memory and promote desired personal characteristics—such as risk-taking and sociability. Perfected bodies will be taller, leaner, quicker, and will require less sleep—no longer needing to go off line eight hours a day." Among which subculture are risk-taking and sociability most "desired"? And who wants to be "on line" twenty-four hours a day? These are not universal values and desires—they tend to characterize successful professionals like the Rothmans themselves (not to mention corporate executives, high-octane entrepreneurs, and other contemporary models of "peak performance"). A similar provincialism surfaces in their sympathetic response to the geneticist J. B. S. Haldane, who predicted that technology would allow "'any two persons on earth ... to be completely present to one another in not more than 1/24 of a second.' (The Internet foreseen?)" Anyone who thinks that the Internet allows us to be "completely present" to one another has been staring into cyberspace too long.

In the Rothmans' account, assimilation to the managerial performance ethic is implicitly equated with "heightened individualism." Conformity and choice are conflated. Perhaps this confusion is only a symptom of the individualist faith that the Rothmans find everywhere—even in pseudo-feminist defenses of eating disorders, which claim that "what appears to be pathological is really independent behavior. 'Anorexia,' [the cultural studies scholar] Noelle Casky maintains, 'is the cultivation of a specific image as an *image*—it is a purely artificial creation and that is why it is so admired. Will alone produces it and maintains it against considerable odds.'" This fatuous and appalling statement deserves scrutiny. The determination to reduce compulsive behavior to "will alone" reflects the Orwellian anti-logic that pervades our public talk. The sanctification of will inverts the clichés of the therapeutic ethos: recoiling from victimhood, the devotees of choice create a creed of absolute autonomy. Does this official fantasy signify a sense of helplessness? Is the owl of Minerva flying at dusk?

THE ROTHMANS DO NOT BOTHER with such speculations, but once they get down to actual cases, the rhetoric of consumer choice fades quickly and a fascinating chapter in the history of twentieth-century medicine unfolds. It begins with the heady optimism of the early days of hormone research in the 1920s. The discovery of insulin transformed diabetes from a life-threatening disease into a chronic condition. Endocrinology was born, and with it the reductionist belief that "you are your hormones." Hormones were the genes of the 1920s, the master keys to manipulating the self. "They shape our skulls and shape our souls," said the Harvard geneticist R. G. Haskins. Small wonder these mysterious entities were freighted with utopian hopes.

Great expectations bred commercial opportunities. The Rothmans expertly chart the growing symbiosis between pharmaceutical companies and physicans. The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 had exempted drugmakers from labeling requirements if the drug was prescribed by a physician. Doctors became patients' purchasing agents, at least for the "ethical" drugs that required a prescription. Manufacturers of prescription drugs shed their snake-oil past (even though many of them were still making patent medicines, too); public suspicion of them ebbed. So did physicians' suspicions, as "detail men" from the drug companies began routinely stopping by the doctor's office, promoting the company line without taking orders directly. The relationship seemed cleansed of commercialism. By the 1940s, however, advertisements in medical journals were giving the game away. Especially with respect to estrogen-based drugs, they offered the same promises of rejuvenation that one could find in the advertisements for the burgeoning beauty industry. The medical profession and mass culture had converged. As the Rothmans write, "It was as if Johns Hopkins joined Hollywood to teach women how to use compounds, clothing, and cosmetics."

NOWHERE WAS THIS COLLABORation clearer than in the history of estrogen replacement therapy (ERT). At first the discovery of estrogen seemed to promise female emancipation. It posed a challenge to the nineteenth-century assumption that women were ruled by their anatomy. As part of a broader move from anatomy to physiology, endocrinology shifted attention from the static uterus to the fluid ovaries. The emphasis on hormones opened for women the possibility of self-transformation—indeed, of a more subtle conception of sex differences generally, as endocrinologists in search of estrogen discovered huge quantities of it in stallions as well as in mares. The idea that sex traits were manipulable haltingly took hold.

Male doctors and their allies in the pharmaceutical industry did most of the manipulating. Economic interest melded with scientific hubris. For many medical researchers, the latter motive was stronger. Endocrinologists were characterized from the outset by excessive zeal. They medicalized menstruation, making sharper distinctions between normality and pathology, even advocating estrogen treatments to prevent sterility in young menstruating women. The absence of data rarely bothered them.

From the outset, ERT was as much a treatment for unhappiness as for sterility. It promoted uterine bleeding in patients who were not menstruating, but it did not stimulate their ovaries. Yet this bleeding made them feel more "womanly"—or so the researchers claimed. ERT enthusiasts argued that pseudo-menstruation sustained dreams of rejuvenation among aging women. As the gynecologist Robert Wilson wrote in *Feminine Forever* in 1966, ERT "beats nature at her own game," restoring sexuality, mental vigor, and a sense of mastery to women who might once have been dismissed as dried-out old biddies. Whether the women would have dismissed themselves was

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another question, but the mass media were convinced that Premarin and similar drugs were "Pills to Keep Women Young."

Like all treatments that promote cell growth, ERT carried a risk of cancer. Researchers noted the possible link as early as 1937, but it was not openly discussed until the 1970s, no doubt partly in response to feminist critiques of male medicine. But the use of ERT continued to rise, as did the gathering of data about it. The inertia of grantsmanship and the desire for academic promotion meant that many researchers remained professionally invested in ERT. The link between hormone replacement and cardiac health was discredited when, in July, 2002, the National Institutes of Health stopped a clinical trial of estrogen supplements because it was too dangerous to the participants to allow it to continue. The Rothmans wonder: will women view the rise and fall of ERT as a cautionary tale with implications for other forms of enhancement, such as plastic surgery or liposuction? Their own evidence (and Blum's) suggests: don't bet on it.

Testosterone replacement never became the male equivalent of ERT. Men do not experience menopause, nor do they go to the doctor as often as women. And the medical profession never embraced testosterone with the enthusiasm doctors extended to estrogen. In a revealing expression of gender stereotypes, the American Medical Association worried openly during the 1940s about randy old men demanding too much from their aging spouses (and maybe from themselves) and spilling their seed recklessly about the social landscape. But by the 1990s, hormone replacement had been assimilated to the male performance agenda. Prescriptions of testosterone to healthy older men increased dramatically—without convincing clinical evidence of its effectiveness or even safety, but with the pharmaceutical companies' fervent support.

The 1990s also marked the growing popularity of growth hormone, primarily for children who were "too short." In this case the distinction between cure and enhancement threatened to disappear altogether. In 1993 the NIH convened a panel on growth hormone research, producing a therapeutic policy statement that uncannily recalled the sociological jurisprudence of the *Brown* v. *Board of Education* decision four decades before. Shortness, like the segregation of black students, created psychic pain and social disadvantage. These combined effects constituted the disease of low self-esteem, which was treatable with growth hormones. This conclusion cheered drug manufacturers. As the Rothmans point out, "No one had a greater stake in blurring the distinction between cure and enhancement than the pharmaceutical companies." One of them, Genentech, set up the Human Growth Foundation in 1965 to provide the promotion of growth hormone with a spuriously scientific legitimacy, which the "foundation" has done for decades. A year after the NIH conference, the U.S. Attorney's Office indicted a Genentech subsidiary for paying kickbacks to a Minnesota physician named David Brown, who had received more than $1.1 million for prescribing the company's product, Protropin. Meanwhile, the benefits of growth hormone remain problematic and the side effects uncertain, but the promise of enhanced self-esteem keeps consumers coming back for more.

It is easy to dismiss drug-industry apologetics that substitute therapeutic clichés for serious thought, but it is harder to write off the pain of failing to fit in. Parents and their "too short" children confront a physiologically perfectionist society, as coercive in its demands as the old righteous communities had been—but without the Christian hope of forgiveness and redemption. The Rothmans ignore the subtle power of this perfectionist consensus. They conclude that Aldous Huxley's nightmare of genetic engineering as social control has given way to a more benign individualist vision: "technologies that we once feared as coercive are now being viewed as liberating." The passive voice is telling. Who has come to view these technologies as "liberating"? And how has this change occurred? One suspects, yet again, that the dream of the body triumphant is a fantasy designed to feed on popular feelings of impotence, and to make a few people very rich.

IV.

Still, bodies interact with technology in a variety of venues. If one ventures outside the clinical setting to places where the relation between the provider and the user of technology is less hierarchical, it is easier to make a case for the individual as an active agent. This is Edward Tenner's approach in *Our Own Devices*. "Arise, and walk," he says in effect to the patient etherized upon a table. Escape the clinician's gaze through a bracing encounter with the actual, material world. Within the discourse of the body, Tenner is Dr. Johnson, refuting Bishop Berkeley's solipsism by kicking a stone in the street.

He is also an American original, a historian of technology with an unparalleled fund of knowledge about ordinary things—from baby bottles to Barcaloungers—and how they work (or do not work) in everyday life. His first book, *Why Things Bite Back*, which appeared in 1996, explored the unintended "revenge effects" of technological innovation—the fire ants that flourished when pesticides intended to eradicate them killed their natural enemies; the long-distance pollution that resulted when Midwestern utility companies built higher smokestacks to meet local environmental laws. The drive to control catastrophe has succeeded in many ways (fewer fatal diseases and industrial accidents, for example), but in its very success, Tenner argued, it has created new and subtler problems of managing chronic conditions. Better emergency care, for example, has enabled more

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people to survive serious brain injuries, but they need constant attention. Few historians have a better grasp of the ironies of technological progress, or of the capacity of the material world to resist human manipulation, than Tenner.

Our Own Devices is a worthy complement to *Why Things Bite Back*. While the earlier book stressed things' capacity to thwart their makers' intentions, the new one emphasizes the makers' ability to learn from their mistakes and make better things. The devices in question are all designed to be extensions of the human body. But it is a body quite different from the one that pervades most academic discourse. It is not being tinkered with; it is doing the tinkering. *Our Own Devices* is a celebration of what used to be called Yankee ingenuity, the refusal to rest content with existing methods. For Tenner, innovation is a life force, even if its necessity is not immediately apparent. Acoustic pianos have remained unchanged for centuries, resisting a variety of improvement schemes and risking ascent into "glorious anachronism"; but "fortunately," Tenner writes, "there are always a few men and women who refuse to be intimidated by stability," and they are designing more responsive pianos that need less frequent tuning.

Seldom has one encountered a more straightforward application of that much-misunderstood intellectual tradition known as American pragmatism. Tenner's method restores pragmatism's original meaning as an ethos rather than a doctrine, less a philosophy than a means of doing without one—a skepticism toward a priori assumptions, an openness to experiment, a willingness to evaluate ideas with respect to their consequences in everyday life. By reconstructing the pragmatic methods of inventors and designers, Tenner captures the dialectical interplay between body technology and body technique. Each calls the other into being: how people use office chairs determines what changes they demand or resist, and those changes in turn shape new uses and new demands. The picture is a little too pure, a little too thoroughly cleansed of the vagaries of fashion and the passion for profit—but it does perform the essential task of restoring some creative tension between the body and the technology meant to serve it. The perfectionist project seems looser, more open to unforeseen possibility when it turns from the body to the wider world.

For all his emphasis on choice, though, even Tenner evokes the specter of compulsion. Occasionally he alludes to "a technological treadmill, from which it is difficult to step down." Once humans step on it, by simply sitting in chairs or wearing shoes, they embark on a process of constant adjustment to ever-quickening technological change. The treadmill metaphor implies that choices are sometimes severely limited, especially for ordinary users of technology outside specialized communities of designers and inventors. Tenner rarely acknowledges the role of corporate capital in promoting innovations for no purpose greater than profit—the proliferation of new software programs and the planned obsolescence of many still perfectly serviceable ones, to take a particularly egregious pair of examples. It is difficult for nonspecialists to see through the haze of mystification surrounding many technological developments, much of it generated by the advertising industry. In contrast, Tenner's model of technological change depends on pristine clarity—on what Habermas calls an "ideal speech situation," a community of equality and transparency in communication. It is a beautiful idea, and it may even exist from time to time among the designers, the inventors, and the engineers Tenner described. But it is an idea that is usually shaped and modified by larger institutional interests.

TENNER TENDS TO NEGLECT those interests. More palpable objects arrest his gaze. "My goal," he writes, "is to promote new ways of looking at the commonplace. For I agree with Oscar Wilde that the true mystery of the world is not the invisible but the visible." Tenner is trying to revive interest in the mysteries of materiality in our postmodern culture—a culture supposedly saturated in two-dimensional images and drunk on ephemera. Who better to enlist in the cause than Wilde, the postmodern aesthete par excellence?

But Tenner's real heroes are not aesthetes, they are artisans. Indeed, his whole account of technological change places a striking stress on the freelance inventor, the maverick designer, the creative individual over the anonymous organization. "Those who create things, whether door knobs or glass pipes, can only begin to imagine how they will be used." Fortuitous circumstance nurtures creative innovation. Ideas can come from anywhere: the central control room at Fermilab, a major neutrino research center near Chicago, was inspired by the round subterranean den of the Teletubbies. (Many parents and grandparents at Fermilab were fans.) The key to design improvement is adaptability and openness to unpredictability. As Tenner writes, "Almost anything can be made better by user experimentation." This is the "benign and positive side to the unintended.... In other species, natural selection and social selection shape the appearance of the animal. In humanity, technology helps shape identity. Our material culture changes by an unpredictable, dialectical flux of instrument and performance, weapon and tactic"—the coevolution of body technique and body technology.

Sometimes technology appears to destroy technique. We still have the phrase "smooth operator," but we no longer have telegraph operators. So what? says Tenner. "Designers—often rightly—aim to make some skills obsolete. What virtue was there in trimming a wick, cranking an automobile, tuning a crystal radio set, or even (for casual amateurs) focusing a camera manually?" He is determined not to enlist on the side of the Luddites, or anyone else protesting the end of an artisanal way of life: the destruction of craft skills, he says at various times, is either trivial or a mirage. Manual skills have migrated from work to sports and hobbies, or from using a stick shift to installing an infant car seat (apparently a pretty tricky business these days). As Tenner observes, technological innovation does not simply destroy old techniques, it also demands new ones by "making inherently dangerous things easy to use." Nine-millimeter pistols have been made easy to use but hard to use safely. Something similar is true of the anti-lock braking system—or at least the hype surrounding it—which encourages risky driving in snow and ice. Anyone who has ever seen a sport utility vehicle careening toward him at a stoplight on an icy road knows what Tenner is talking about.

The heart of Tenner's book is his discussion of the "devices" themselves: baby bottles and formula, sandals and running shoes, sitting and reclining chairs, musical and text keyboards, eyeglasses and helmets. As in all of Tenner's work, we discover a fascinating variety of arcane details about how nature and culture interacted to shape the body's presentation of itself to the world. We find that French convent girls were taught to

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walk with clenched fists, that Franklin Roosevelt kept his chin up for the decidedly unheroic purpose of preventing his pince-nez from falling off his nose, and that cockatoos can learn to roller skate. The facts come thick and fast.

Still, there are patterns. Their particular form depends on power relations. When innovations come from the top down, technology dominates technique. This is clearest in the case of bottle-feeding, which began with the British medical profession's effort to lower malnutrition and infant mortality among the London poor—a noble intention, but one that was ideologically charged with Victorian tendencies to equate health with conformity to bourgeois norms. Tenner acknowledges these class blinders but de-emphasizes them. The medicalization of child-rearing was not social control, he believes, but a response to lay enthusiasm for "scientific motherhood." The nature of this enthusiasm deserves closer scrutiny: consumer demand is limited and problematic when framed by the authority of experts. The dialectic is not as democratic as it seems.

The rise of bottle-feeding may have depended on popular support, but it owed most to scientist-entrepreneurs such as the German chemist Baron Justus von Liebig, who built a transatlantic business during the mid–nineteenth century by selling a canned facsimile of breast milk. Commerce and technology intertwined from the outset, sometimes with calamitous consequences. "Bottle-feeding may exact a high price in medical costs," Tenner concludes, "but as long as medicines exist to treat the illnesses it increases, the technological treadmill will roll on." At this point one wonders whether the treadmill is entirely technological, or whether the flow of capital investment might be powering it as well.

BUT TENNER'S DEMOCRATIC account of technological change is more persuasive when he turns to other topics—shoes, for instance. He ignores the tired but inevitable questions regarding fashion. (Are high heels a patriarchal punishment or a freely chosen sadomasochistic fetish? And does anyone care?) Instead he focuses on the triumph of sandals and sneakers over the stiff "corrective" shoes of the early and mid–twentieth century. Here the hierarchs have met their match: "The dream of molding ideal feet through stiffly engineered shoes is as dated as the idea of the superiority of formula to mother's milk." Demands for flexible and responsive footwear have been even more influential in shaping the design of athletic shoes. Since the 1930s, Tenner argues, there has been a growing awareness of the relationship between athletes' specific needs and the construction of their shoes. Some of the most important design innovations arose from the experience of the designers themselves. The Italian mountain climber Vitale Bramani developed Vibram, a new sole material that combined strength and grip, after six of his companions died in a storm in their slippery, lightweight boots. The American yachtsman Paul Sperry invented the Sperry Topsider, a deck shoe with a superior grip, after he nearly drowned in a sailing accident. Though both of these innovations made big money for the innovators, they nevertheless epitomize the pragmatic, vernacular process of technological change that Tenner rightly values. But when he discusses the extraordinary rise of Nike, he is less eager to dwell on the more sordid aspects of "the global footwear market that emerged in the 1970s," such as the irresistible economic appeal (to executives and stockholders) of Third World suppliers whose sweatshop operations mean minuscule labor costs. To ponder the plight of running-shoe fabricators is to acknowledge that their bodies, too, are part of this tangle of flesh and muscle, rubber and steel.

The export of jobs brought the death of essential skills, such as last-making and pattern-cutting. The emergence of computer-assisted design and manufacturing (CAD/CAM) meant that "industrial designers without shoe experience could work with software models of lasts." Tenner is undisturbed by this dematerialization of design; indeed, it illustrates his argument that craftsmanship is never destroyed, only relocated. So we can hope. Yet the aesthetic consequences of computerization were profound: with the coming of CAD/CAM, transparency and functionality—those core principles of modernist industrial design—were out and surface was everything. "The outside of the shoe no longer had to reflect the interior," Tenner observes. "It was open to fashion." This suggests just the sort of "two-dimensionality" that is supposed to pervade our image-addled society, but Tenner traces it to precise developments within a particular industry—he does not claim that "we" are all imprisoned by it.

Yet Tenner realizes that there is a fundamental trade-off embedded in our relationship with material progress. While any pop sociologist worth his salt knows that the triumph of the automobile has come at a fearful price, Tenner's genius is to find that trade-off in the most banal and taken-for-granted objects of everyday life. Even the humble chair, he shrewdly observes, "is a machine for producing dependency on itself." (Think of the other technologies, beginning with cars and computers, that this formulation illuminates.) The side effect of chair-sitting is a weakening of the back muscles. Much of the world still squats; the complex cultures of Asia, Tenner reminds us, were conducted at floor level. There is nothing inherently natural about sitting in a chair.

As the world urbanizes, however, more and more rural people who are unused to sitting will learn to sit in a "task chair" while they do their work. (In my daughter's kindergarten in the Washington, D.C. suburbs during the 1980s, rote academic exercises were called "seat work"—something every child had to learn to tolerate if she were to join the white-collar salariat.) Sitting in a chair, like conforming to clock time, has become an essential part of assimilation to modern adulthood. What Tenner finally shows, though, is that even if chairs are culture-bound objects, designers (working mostly for American companies) have been deucedly clever about making them more mobile, flexible, and comfortable. From the rocking chair to the La-Z-Boy and contemporary ergonomic office

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Sealed into this leaky
barrel of myself,
I brace against staves
creaking and aching
as the bitter river
races toward a niagara
thundering dead ahead:
can my rattled heart
survive unpulverized
the pandemonium
of that tumbling plunge,
touch bottom then surface
to yellow slickers waving
from the boat's misty deck?

MICHAEL McFEE

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designs, the Americanization of posture has meant the introduction of a standard more fluid than "sitting up straight."

IN CAPTURING THESE CONTRIBUTIONS, Tenner reveals his characteristic curiosity and hope. He concludes by rejecting both utopian and apocalyptic fantasies of a posthuman future. The body itself, he believes, remains a surprisingly and reassuringly conservative influence, a drag on cyborg fantasies. Yet our relation to our own devices is still problematic. Augmenting our powers, these things also increase their power over us. Standardization constantly threatens creativity. What is to be done? Tenner's remedy is to return to the classic collaborations between makers and users, the kind that produced the American fire fighter's helmet or the QWERTY keyboard. He believes in participatory design, user-friendly but also user-challenging; he rejects the "one best way" of Taylorite managerial theory in favor of shop-floor-workers' active engagement in product development.

He finds hope for this democratic vision in the human hand itself—specifically, in the shift of the hand's power base from index finger to thumb. The proliferation of cell phones, Palm Pilots, video games, and the like has begun to have a pronounced biological impact: "thumbs all around the world are becoming stronger and more skillful." Does this matter? Tenner thinks so. The index finger, he says, has long been an instrument of authoritarian virtue; it is the finger that the moralist wags in the miscreant's face, or that the pedagogue uses to proscribe behavior. But the thumb is associated with practical knowledge (rules of thumb) or tacit understanding of how to do things (a green thumb). "Most of all," he concludes, "when extended in the almost lost art of hitchhiking, the thumb shows the right attitude toward the future, open and co-operative but with a firm sense of direction."

This is Tenner at his best, evoking a Whitmanesque sense of possibility. But the thrum of the treadmill can still be heard, and the hitchhiking metaphor is profoundly at odds with it. The hitchhiker knows where he is going (even if he does not know how he is getting there), but the treadmill is going nowhere—it is simply locked in its own self-replicating system of repetitive movement. The contrast between the hitchhiker and the treadmill raises questions about the larger context of technological change. Why, after all, is hitchhiking "almost a lost art"? One can muster all sorts of formulaic answers about atomization and anonymity (and crime or the fear of it). The truth, though, is that hitchhiking on the interstate highway system, which carries most long-distance car traffic, could land you in jail (it is illegal) or kill you. Whitman's open road is filled with SUVs doing 80 miles per hour—not a very enticing place to explore the universe. That concrete network of high-speed, heavy-volume, limited-access highways is an institutional constraint on the vernacular improvisation that Tenner prizes. And sometimes, especially at rush hour, it can feel like a treadmill.

So we are left to wrestle with the dilemmas of choice and compulsion: how to sustain a sense of surprise in a society saturated with system; how to create idiosyncratic possibilities in a culture committed to conventionalized models of perfection. The hitchhiker and the treadmill remind us that the paradoxes of modernity and postmodernity are, after all, the same. Despite the recent resurrection of the body, the supposedly free-floating self is still troubled by the prospect of imprisonment and tempted by the dream of escape. ■

David Tracy
God's Realist

THE SERENITY PRAYER: FAITH AND POLITICS IN TIMES OF PEACE AND WAR
By Elisabeth Sifton
(W. W. Norton, 367 pp., $26.95)

THIS SPLENDID AND STRENUOUS book was occasioned by a bizarre mistake: a famous prayer, composed by the author's father, was uprooted from its context, re-worded, and misappropriated. There is no copyright on prayers, of course. They are composed in the hope that they will help people, starting with the people who compose them. Most prayers are best left to the uses of personal piety. But some prayers strike a chord across traditions, cultures, individuals; and more than any prayer composed in English since the Elizabethans, Reinhold Niebuhr's "Serenity Prayer" is one of those extraordinary supplications.

"God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other": the plain style of Niebuhr's meditation has enabled its genuine profundity to touch even the most secular among us, to provoke individuals who ordinarily avoid such a vocabulary to find a place for it in their lives. Elisabeth Sifton wisely suggests that her father's prayer may be both consciously prayed by believers and unconsciously prayed even in the mere reading of it. Who does not want serenity, courage, and wisdom to deal with whatever chance, or fate, or providence, has meted out?

Prayer, if it comes at all, usually comes as a surprise—as an unexpected gift from some hidden source in oneself or outside oneself. And the language of prayer discloses some awareness, however inchoate, of the ultimately real. Many names have been given to this greater reality: the Void, the Vast, the Good Beyond Being, the Infinite, the One, the Way, Other Power, the gods, God. But the experience of prayer is always a limiting experience, in that the limit of our finitude is reached. Good prayers, like good religious poetry, are very rare. They need not be a matter of explicit belief, but only of a felt relationship to whatever the individual senses at times is on the other side of the possible. Good prayers can be powerful not only for believers in God, but for almost anyone willing to allow the resources of their quiet language to unlock the explosive power of their content.

Niebuhr was correct to acknowledge that the religious sentiments in his prayer were not original. Neither are the religious sentiments of Donne and Words-

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worth, of Hopkins, Rossetti, and Eliot. Niebuhr's prayer should not be trifled with any more than we should change Donne's language to find something more palatable, more "relevant," more "customized." At the same time, Niebuhr was willing to let his prayer loose in the world without worrying too much about where it might land. Prayers, unlike poems, should be free to change sensibilities and even languages. Niebuhr endorsed the adoption of his prayer by Alcoholics Anonymous, even when the group substantially changed the wording. It seems that he was more amused than angered by less happy uses of the "Serenity Prayer"—sometimes as a new item of Christian kitsch throughout the world, as the prayer that appeared on tea containers, tacky banners, and silly balloons. Why worry about all that if the prayer helped? Would Correggio have complained about all those Christmas cards? Kitsch is often a sign that a faith still lives, that it still serves the needs of all the sorts of people there actually are.

YET THERE ARE LIMITS. Niebuhr's widow and his daughter were justifiably incensed by one particular appropriation of the Serenity Prayer, and his daughter was provoked to write this book so as to correct it. In the aftermath of World War II, a German professor translated Niebuhr's prayer (which was used by American soldiers) into German. The translation was not a good one, and the lackadaisical professor added, as its possible author, the name Oetinger, a minor eighteenth-century German Pietist who may have been a remote ancestor of the professor or his wife. So it was as a new German Pietist prayer that the German version of Niebuhr's supplication took off in postwar Germany. And this new German Pietist prayer was eventually carved grandiosely upon the walls of the Bundeswehr's cadet academy in Koblenz.

Sifton is entirely right to call this episode, from beginning to end, "sleazy." The shifty professor seemed unaware that Reinhold Niebuhr had spent a lifetime trying to free his religion from precisely this kind of Pietistic, personal, anti-intellectual, and non-political version of Christianity. Niebuhr knew, loved, and criticized the German cultural tradition in philosophy and theology. But like his contemporary Walter Benjamin, he was acutely aware that every document of civilization is at the same time a document of barbarism. He feared that militarism might be endemic to German culture, and he fought against it with prophetic fury. At the same time, unlike other progressives of his time, Niebuhr never seized upon the Nazi horror to reject German culture *tout court.* Niebuhr grew up speaking German in the Midwest. He did not speak English fluently until his years as a student in divinity school at Yale. He knew German culture and language from the inside of the German-American enclave of his period as well as Mencken did—with very different results, of course. And he knew from personal experience how German-Americans were often demonized by other Americans in World War I. His brother, also a distinguished theologian, similarly continued to honor German philosophy and theology in his work, but he changed his Midwestern German-American name from Helmut Richard Niebuhr to H. Richard Niebuhr. Reinhold Niebuhr kept his German name. So his prayer did not deserve to be adapted to a tradition that he fought theologically all his life, the German and American traditions of Pietism, much less to a German martial tradition that he despised.

THE ONLY WONDERFUL THING to have come out of the whole dreary episode is this book. Elisabeth Sifton is a natural writer, and also (not surprisingly, since she is one of the most distinguished editors in American publishing) a natural editor: the structure of her account is subtle and seductive. The reader only gradually becomes aware of the true scale of what is discussed here. Sifton has written a history disguised as a memoir. She begins, you might say, with serenity: the story of the place where Niebuhr found summer relief from his almost unbelievably active life of teaching, writing, organizing political committees, and circuit-riding (his phrase) throughout the country preaching to Protestant Americans, and to anyone else who would listen, about Christian political responsibility. She begins in a small town in northwestern Massachusetts called Heath.

As Sifton describes Heath in those days, it was not the usual summer place. To be sure, it was beautiful: the hills, the streams, the hardscrabble New England land. The tough soil of New England surprised both of Sifton's parents—her Midwestern father, who was used to the inordinately rich farmland of his childhood in Missouri and Illinois, and her English mother, who grew up in the gentler lands and rhythms of old England, where her Anglican ancestors had stayed on while the hard Puritans escaped to the hard, almost Puritanical land of New England. Heath does sound delightful in Sifton's pages recalling it. The local farmers (apparently Republicans almost all) and the summer people, mostly progressive, social-justice-oriented Protestant clergymen ("Too many clerics," thought their close friend Auden after a visit to the Niebuhrs), managed to co-exist very well indeed. The summer intellectuals also included the occasional agnostic, including the indomitable Felix Frankfurter.

But for such a group Heath could not be all serenity. These folks were not Buddhists. They were a brilliant and beleaguered group of progressive intellectuals who loved America because America preached, and partly achieved, what Niebuhr liked to call "rough" justice. And they knew, in America in the 1930s, that too many Americans were left out of this American justice. The Heath summer people fought against every injustice that came to their attention. Sifton's recollections of a magical childhood place introduce a remarkable cast of characters who made up the summer community of Heath, and most remarkable of all, I think, was Frankfurter. He and Niebuhr became lifelong friends who helped each other throughout their very active and very reflective lives. It was the agnostic Frankfurter who, in Niebuhr's frail and often depressed final years, reminded him of the need to accept with serenity what cannot be changed.

I must confess that finally I was somewhat keen to leave Heath behind. After a while the place began to seem a little like Wilder's Grover's Corners. (The Heath chapters end with the memory of a local production of *Our Town.*) The great

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events of the day were happening elsewhere, after all. And the public story of Reinhold Niebuhr takes off in Sifton's stirring middle chapters. World War II overwhelmed whatever serenity the summer inhabitants of Heath had managed to find, and it is amazing what Niebuhr managed to accomplish in those years. He produced his greatest theological work, his Gifford Lectures, which appeared as *The Nature and Destiny of Man* in two volumes in 1941 and 1943. The concluding lectures were delivered to the accompaniment of German bombs exploding near Edinburgh. Before the war, he wrote article after article against American isolationism. Before and even during the war, he traveled as much as possible to England (and to Germany before the war) to help mobilize the anti-totalitarian struggle in the churches.

He crisscrossed the United States like a half-mad prophet with a mission to call Protestant America to its ethical and political responsibilities. He taught Christian social ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He helped émigrés and refugees, such as Paul Tillich, find jobs in the United States. Even before the Allied victory was sure, Niebuhr joined Louis Brandeis, Felix Frankfurter, Isaiah Berlin, and others to argue forcefully for the establishment of a Jewish homeland after the war. At home he continued to fight for human rights, and in those war years he began to fight more vigorously for civil rights for black Americans. He became, in sum, one of the leading intellectuals in America, and perhaps the most significant theological voice in the land.

The structure of Sifton's narrative is borrowed from the structure of her father's prayer: from the brief periods of serenity in Heath she moves to the courage and the wisdom of the years before, during, and after the war, ending with the tough-minded assurance of Niebuhr's last years, which were marred by a series of strokes. The great man died in 1971. Toward the end of his life, Niebuhr fought Stalin's totalitarianism—correctly, Sifton insists: she is wonderfully undiscomfited by her father's role in the Cold War—with the same fervor with which he fought Hitler's fascism. He exposed the naïve and shameful self-delusion regarding Soviet communism of too many American progressives of the time. For this honorable action, some progressives still dishonor Niebuhr, when they would be better off questioning their own disgraceful part in making excuses for the horrors of Stalin and his successors. It goes almost without saying that Niebuhr was just as fierce in his opposition to Joseph McCarthy and all that he stood for.

Those were times in which many people, including many good people, made terrible errors of judgment. In this regard, Niebuhr's record is sterling. He never lost his head. This cleric turned out to be one of America's most tough-minded liberals. How many other people denounced the saturation bombings of German and Japanese cities as well as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? How many other theologians were willing to take on Billy Graham, Cardinal Spellman, and Nixon's prayer meetings and the rabbis, priests, and ministers who officiated at them? How many other Christian leaders had the guts to criticize the churches so ferociously for their ethical and political apathy? Like Amos, his favorite biblical prophet, Niebuhr never hesitated to expose the delinquency of political and ecclesiastical leaders who failed to take up the cause of the widow, the orphan, and the stranger.

REINHOLD NIEBUHR'S THEOLOGY was his own blend of two traditions: classical Protestant liberalism and the great mid-twentieth-century movement of Protestant neo-orthodoxy. His theological liberalism, which goes back to Schleiermacher, consists in reinterpreting all the major Christian symbols in direct relationship to modernity. This is most ringingly expressed in Niebuhr's assertion that "most religious symbols should be taken seriously but not literally." The second source for Niebuhr's theology was the Protestant neo-orthodoxy inspired by Karl Barth. Neo-orthodoxy was an attempt to insist that the Christian tradition, if properly interpreted, challenged modern innocence about the adequacy of Enlightenment reason alone to solve our problems. For Niebuhr this meant recovering the classical Christological symbols of the early councils, and Luther's understanding of human nature as flawed and self-deluding, and Calvin's sense of history replacing nature as the locus of God's covenantal presence.

Niebuhr's position can be more accurately described as neo-Reformation rather than as neo-orthodox, since his main theological task was to recover the Reformation's reading of Augustine and Paul. For Niebuhr, Augustine serves as an unexpected and rather significant influence upon liberalism. Shorn of its strictly mythological elements, *City of God*, with its profound grasp of the fallibility of the human, and therefore of the darker side of mortal affairs, deserves to challenge and to inform modern liberal thought. Niebuhr never retreated from his defense of the accomplishments of modern reason in science, pluralism, and modern democracy; but he insisted that this was not the end of the story. He demanded that the liberal temper find a place for a grimmer and more realistic assessment of the tragic and sinful actuality of every society. The latter insight is not soluble by modern secular reasons alone, or by upbeat Christian liberal appeals to our "natural goodness." Niebuhr called this second reality the "realism" of the Reformation.

In this daring and original enterprise, Niebuhr rethought one of the most unlikely symbols in the whole Christian tradition: original sin. This symbol, first fully articulated by Augustine in the West, unsettlingly portrayed the human predicament as a tangled combination of free will and the conflicts that it engenders. This situation seemed to bear no purely rational solution. Niebuhr's recovery of the Augustinian understanding of human complexity had remarkable resonance in a secular age that was kindling to Freud's tragic vision in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

By daring to retrieve a demythologized version of original sin, Niebuhr provided a critique of Protestant liberalism at its weakest: its naïve understanding of the intrinsic goodness of human beings and its misplaced hope in the ability of love and understanding to overcome all personal and social conflicts. Niebuhr joined the liberals to insist that "original sin" could not be literalized: there was no literal "Eden," no "Adam," no "Eve," no serpent, no historical "fall." Yet he fought the liberal dismissal of the tragic and sinful truth in the symbol of original sin. He was part of a larger movement in the philosophical and political culture of his time. Those were the years when Pascal's terror and Kierkegaard's dread were revered even by secular intellectuals, when Eliot and (in his way) Auden were reading the modern world anew through Christian eyes. Barth had a point in insisting in his early German Expressionist theology that "revelation comes like a stone" to

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change not only our answers but also our questions. Niebuhr concurred in Barth's hard, lucid image of the stone; and he agreed even more with his colleague Tillich, in his response to Barth, that "man does not receive answers to questions he has never asked."

For many in those "existentialist" days it was time to recover, under the influence of Kierkegaard, the authentic individual. But Niebuhr had no time for the sentimentalities of existentialism. There was moral and political work to be done. His realism was enlisted in the service of the prophetic call to justice. As Niebuhr would argue, love (which he nicely described as "the impossible possibility") was never enough to overthrow an entrenched structural evil. Historical action, politics, was needed, too. Niebuhr was able to develop a realism that was Christian in its source but at the same time modern in its effect. So much was this the case that some secular American thinkers called themselves "atheists for Reinhold Niebuhr." He helped them to overcome their earlier Deweyan belief in reason alone, as much as he helped Christian liberals to abandon "love alone" as a solution to an unjust society.

NIEBUHR'S TRAGIC SENSIBILITY seemed exactly right for the struggle against fascism and, after it, against communism. His immense influence on American political thought, especially in the years following World War II, was largely owed to his surprising use of the Christian symbols of grace and sin to illuminate our common passage through our ambiguous histories and societies. Once the category of "original sin" was extended beyond its literal meaning, it became an unexpectedly useful symbol for representing the dilemma of our wills inevitably trapping themselves, and therefore nullifying our best reasons and our best intentions by imprisoning them in the grasping confines of our possessive egos. It is little wonder that Martin Luther King Jr. always understood himself to be a Niebuhrian in his insistence on the need for both love and justice to fight the intolerable nature of American racism; and Niebuhr always encouraged King in the development of the kinds of realistic ideas and actions that were needed for the noble struggle.

Reinhold Niebuhr was, I think, the finest American theologian since Jonathan Edwards, and perhaps the most profound religious realist in America since Abraham Lincoln. Like Edwards, Niebuhr never hesitated to summon explicitly Christian resources to understand the world and to explain his understanding to others. Like Lincoln, he never confined his insights to the orbit of Christianity, but instead employed a Christian vision to cast a powerful light on our common history in its frightening and tragic ambiguity. Recall Lincoln's extraordinary Second Inaugural Address, with its daring theism that sought not only to rally its listeners to their own cause but also to raise them above it. It is no surprise that Niebuhr considered the famously unchurched and theologically uneducated Lincoln the best theologian in American history. Lincoln's realistic vision of the tragedy of the Civil War found a fully theological rendering in the later Christian realism of Niebuhr.

Niebuhr's theological position was not without its shortcomings, as Langdon Gilkey has shown. It was constrained by the polemical and apologetic character of Christian thought in his period. Niebuhr's theology was also, from today's perspective, very narrow in its lack of interest in other religions. To be sure, he was a Christian ecumenicist, as in his very affirmative reassessment of Catholicism near the end of his life after Vatican II; and he was also unusual among Christian thinkers of his period in his sense of the significance of contemporary Judaism. But he was relatively uninterested in, and uninformed about, Islam and the great Eastern traditions of Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism, much less the indigenous traditions of Africa or parts of Latin America. But this is really to say no more than that he was a man of his time.

ELISABETH SIFTON, IN THIS WAY truly her father's daughter, directs a good deal of criticism at the ignorance of many secular intellectuals of religion in general and of Christianity, Judaism, and now Islam in particular. She is right. On the complexities in understanding religion, American intellectuals too often content themselves with recalling the memories of their youth, which are usually unhappy ones. If they took the same lazy way with the arts, they would still be lingering over *The Nutcracker* and *The Exorcist*. Secular intellectuals would do well to heed Sifton's often angry advice to know more before they speak on religion.

But there are also other targets of Sifton's ire, and sometimes she exhibits a narrowness of view that is surprising in the author of such a wise book. Some of her comments on her fellow Christians, especially Catholics and Evangelicals, are troubling. Her peremptory remarks about Catholic things—on the Catholic theology of baptism, and on John Courtney Murray's relationship with the Vatican—are unfortunate. In her excellent description of the work of Protestant liberals for social justice in the 1930s and 1940s, she completely ignores the even more influential role that the Catholic social-justice tradition played: for many leaders of labor unions, for many Catholic workers (often a majority in the northern cities), and even for many Catholic bishops of the period. This omission is even stranger when one remembers that the Catholic social-justice tradition had a powerful influence on Roosevelt's formulation of some of the policies of the New Deal, and that Niebuhr applauded it for its social wisdom even before Vatican II. On Evangelical Christians, Sifton is also at times inappropriately dismissive. In my own view, the most important and in many ways the most original theological work now being done in the United States today is taking place within Evangelical Christianity. Some Evangelical theologians are developing principles of moral and social action that are clearly influenced by Niebuhr, and others are forthrightly rethinking their Evangelical heritage in relationship to modern problems.

But otherwise *The Serenity Prayer* stands as an exceptionally fine study of a crucial moment in American history, and of a figure in that history who is worthy not only of being remembered but also of being imitated. And the imitation of Niebuhr's example should start right away. Niebuhr would have argued, I think, that one should never mock but always respect the genuine Christian piety of George W. Bush. But he also would have warned that such Christian piety threatens us with the disastrous consequences that he criticized in German and American Pietism. Godly people should not be self-righteous, especially when they are in power. The kind of intelligent and God-fearing criticism that Niebuhr provided in his day for the policies of Eisenhower and Dulles, Nixon and Kissinger, is now sorely needed. In this exceedingly un-Niebuhrian moment, American idealism and American realism seem not to know each other anymore. ■

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DEARBORN DIARIST

Exiled

"TODAY IS THE DAY OF CELEBRATION! Today is the day *of victory! Today is a day* of brightness in Iraq!" Just four months ago, Imam Husham Al Husainy stood outside the Karbalaa Islamic Education Center in Dearborn, Michigan, shouting these words upon hearing that coalition forces had captured Saddam Hussein. The news had sent revelers pouring onto Warren Avenue, the thoroughfare that serves as Main Street for Michigan's Arab community, where they banged drums and honked car horns, their voices, according to *The Detroit News*, "hoarse from shouting '*halhoola*,' the joyous yelp reserved for the best of times." They waved flags, too, both Iraqi and U.S., as if to celebrate simultaneously the American soldiers' accomplishment and the partnership that American leaders were establishing with a new, free Iraq.

CERTAINLY, THEY WERE ENTITLED TO their enthusiasm. Most of the Dearborn celebrants were Shia, an ethnic group Saddam's regime famously brutalized over the years. And, although Husainy was an adviser to Mohammed Bakr Al Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (an Iran-backed group with which the United States has long had an uneasy relationship), he was nonetheless among the war's most ardent supporters, going so far as to organize two pro-war demonstrations: one in Dearborn, to cheer President Bush when he spoke at a local hotel; and one in Washington, to counter an antiwar rally on the eve of hostilities. "We've got to get rid of [Saddam]," Husainy told the *News* in October 2002. "He's a bloodsucker, a devil, a thug." Sentiments like these made headlines around the country and were cited regularly by the administration and its supporters as proof that the Iraqi people—who could not speak for themselves at the time—would welcome the Americans as liberators.

BY THIS WEEK, HOWEVER, THE REVELRY at the Karbalaa Center had given way to disappointment, despair, and, increasingly, disgust. Where a year ago worshipers shared with me stories of Saddam's brutality, now they shared stories of postwar *deprivation and violence, much of it wit*nessed firsthand on recent visits back to their homeland. At one point during our conversation, Husainy pulled a photo album from his file cabinet—an odd place for a photo album, except that this wasn't the sort of album one keeps on a coffee table. One picture showed a head severed from its body, its eyes still partially open, lying in a small pool of blood on the street. Another displayed a stray lower leg, bloodied at the knee where it was blown off, with a boot still tied tightly around the foot. The album had two full pages of photos like these, taken in Karbala, Iraq, shortly after bombs killed more than 100 Shia gathered there for a religious festival on March 2. "In Saddam's time, some people were prevented from going there," he told me, "but the people who went there, at least there was no explosions." And, while the bombing was conducted by terrorists sympathetic to Saddam or tied to Al Qaeda, for Husainy it raises the question, "What's the coalition doing if they can't protect us?"

HUSAINY IS NOT THE ONLY ONE ASKING such questions. Over the weekend, a *News* story quoted Imam Sayed Hassan Al Qazwini, Dearborn's other leading Iraqi cleric: "The Bush administration spoke about Iraq becoming a beacon of democracy. But I am afraid Iraq is becoming a beacon of instability." Zayd Allebban, a Shia who's studying law at Wayne State University, echoed the sentiment: "The basic necessities of life are lacking—safety, jobs, water, electricity." Back at the Karbalaa Center, Dearborn's Hussain Al Muslimawi complained to me that American forces are increasingly withdrawing into their compounds—protecting themselves from terrorists but, in the process, cutting themselves off from the Iraqi people whom they are supposed to protect: "The [U.S.] Army doesn't talk to the people. They're scared of the people."

NOR DOES ANYONE AT THE KARBALAA Center seem reassured by the current U.S. effort to crack down on radical cleric Moqtada Al Sadr, whose militia took over government buildings in cities across southern Iraq last week. Although the whole point of the U.S. response is to restore order to Iraq, the response strikes many Dearborn Shia as disproportionate, particularly when the coalition is hiring back many former Baath security officials and when Saddam himself has still not stood trial. Mohammed Albdyri, a 38-year-old math teacher I met at the Center who recently returned from Iraq, said the United States seems much more serious about confronting its Iraqi enemies than helping the Iraqi masses. He added that Sadr's popularity among Shia has a lot to do with the fact that his militia fulfills precisely those needs that the coalition and its nascent Iraqi police force cannot: "My brother-in-law, his car was stolen. He goes to the police, but they say they have no authority. ... So he goes to Al Sadr's militia, and they bring him the truck back after three days."

ALBDYRI AND THE OTHERS AT THE Karbalaa Center would likely be more patient if they believed these were merely bumps on the road to a functional democracy. But they don't believe the occupation is leading to democracy—at least, democracy as they understand it. Over and over again, I heard about the proposed Iraqi constitution, which they interpret as reserving veto power for two rival ethnic groups—the Kurds and the Sunnis—who each represent less than one-quarter of Iraq's people. The Dearborn Shia I met see this as an attempt to again refuse their Iraqi brethren the power Saddam (a Sunni) long denied them. "If you're not going to give us the power, what is the democracy?" asked Albdyri.

IT'S NOT HARD TO FATHOM WHY DEARborn's Shia have grown suspicious of U.S. motives. After all, many of them experienced U.S. betrayal back in 1991, when President George H.W. Bush allowed Saddam to crush the post–Gulf war insurgency. Albdyri still bears the shrapnel scars from an attack by Saddam's helicopters, and he remembers the U.S. F-16 fighters circling high above as the attack occurred. "They've been stabbed in the back once already," says Husainy. "They don't want to be stabbed again." Of course, for all their disillusionment, they have not given up hope. "It is fixable," Husainy says. "We trusted President Bush. We would like to keep trusting him." But just because they'd like to doesn't mean they do. **JONATHAN COHN**

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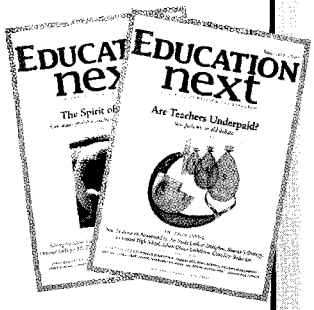
No Child Left Behind: No Unfunded Mandate

INTERESTED IN CUTTING-EDGE IDEAS ABOUT K–12 EDUCATION?



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It has been said, more than once, that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is a mandate that the federal government has failed to fund. Not true. The law is neither unfunded nor, with one exception, much of a mandate.

On the funding side, it costs about twenty dollars to test a student, the only thing NCLB requires all schools to do. Meanwhile, federal dollars have risen steadily since the law's passage; the average district now receives three hundred dollars more per pupil from Washington than it did in 2000.

Other than this test requirement, schools are asked only to show adequate yearly progress toward state- (not federal-) determined goals.

What are the consequences of failing to make this progress? Not much. If a school fails for two years running, the only requirement is to let its students transfer to one of the district's nonfailing schools.

In most cases, inner-city children are not given access to a suburban school, a private school, or a charter school outside the district's boundaries.

Roughly 20 percent of students in big cities currently attend "failing" schools, a percentage certain to rise as the "adequate yearly progress" rule becomes increasingly stringent. Unless schools improve quickly—or states ease their academic standards—most big-city schools are in danger of being defined as failing. With every school so designated, the choice mandate vanishes.

The parental demand for choice remains high. Surveys show that over a fifth of the parents in failing schools would like to consider an alternative. But in practice less than 1 percent of all students in failing schools are switching schools. Some hurdles, such as transportation costs, are practical. But many school districts are actively discouraging parents when they apply. As one Worcester, Massachusetts, official put it, "the feds told us we had to offer a choice, not the parents' choice, but a choice."

After three years, failing schools must also give students tutoring or other extra services. For this, the federal government is providing more than enough funds to pay current costs—and still more money is on its way. The original idea was to bring new providers into education to supplement the work of failed schools, but in many districts the majority of these services are being provided by the district itself.

If schools fail five years in a row, they are to be "reconstituted." Will this mandate, at least, have a bite? Perhaps, but early returns suggest that it has more the teeth of a minnow than of a shark.

Still, there remains one potent mandate. Because of the NCLB testing requirement, parents and taxpayers are being told, more clearly than ever, how much students are learning at school. The feds are making school officials and union leaders squirm under the bright light of continuously available information about school performance. What's so bad about that?

—Paul E. Peterson

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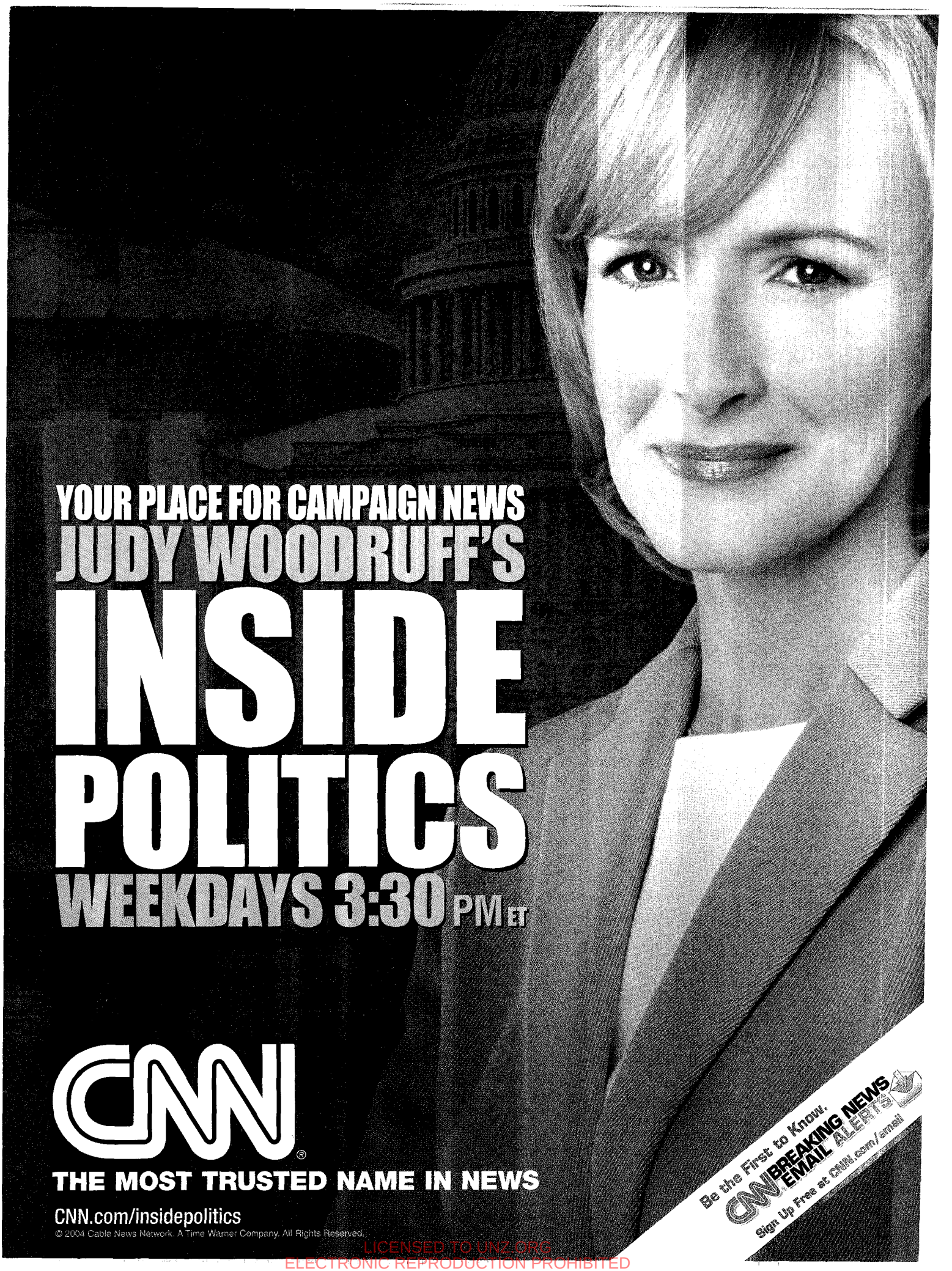
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